

**RE-EXAMINING THE
ACCOUNTABILITY–PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP:
A STUDY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN TWO INDIAN
STATES**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ananya Samajdar", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ananya Samajdar

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	v
Summary	viii
List of Tables.....	x
Glossary of Indian Terms.....	xii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
 CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
SETTING OF THE STUDY	5
OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION	7
Accountability-Performance Relationship Literature	8
Local Government Performance Literature.....	10
Local Accountability Literature.....	10
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: VARIABLES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS	11
The Dependent Variable: Local Government Performance	12
Primary Independent Variables: Accountability, Finances, Capacity.....	12
Secondary Independent Variable: Preferences of Decision Makers	17
METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION	17
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	19
FINDINGS AND MAIN ARGUMENT	23
 CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	27
LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY: CONCEPT AND MECHANISMS	31
The Concept of Accountability	31
Local Accountability: Mechanisms and Actual Functioning	33
LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: CONCEPT, MEASUREMENT AND DETERMINANTS	43
Conceptualization and Measurement.....	44
Determinants of Government Performance	47
Determinants of Local Government Performance.....	49
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE	59
Theoretical Explanations.....	60
Empirical Findings.....	64
CONCLUSION.....	82
 CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	84
CASE SELECTION.....	84
RESEARCH DESIGN: LEVELS OF ANALYSIS	87
Intra-Case Analysis.....	88
Intra-State Comparison of Cases	88
Inter-State Comparison.....	89
CONCEPTUALIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES.....	89
Accountability: Concept and Operationalization.....	90
Performance: Concept and Operationalization.....	96
DATA GATHERING AND DATA ANALYSIS	100
The Gathering of Data.....	101
Data Analysis and Inference	105
METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS	109
 CHAPTER 4 ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WEST BENGAL CASES.....	112
THE SANCTIONING DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY	112
Proportion of Seats Not Won by Single-Largest Party	114
Proportion of Contested Seats	115
Degree of Electoral Defeat of Incumbent Representatives.....	115

Turnover of Ruling/Single-Largest Party	117
Voter Turnout.....	118
Freeness of Election.....	118
THE DELIBERATION DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY.....	119
Frequency of Gram Sansad Meetings	123
Extent of Attendance in Gram Sansad meetings	123
Inclusiveness of Attendance in Gram Sansad Meetings.....	126
Inclusiveness of Decision Making by Gram Sansad.....	128
Extent of Scrutiny of GP Functioning by Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha	131
Overall Effectiveness of Deliberative Mechanisms.....	134
Gram Sansad Meetings : True Forums of Deliberative Democracy?.....	134
THE MONITORING DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY	139
Frequency of Social Audit.....	141
Extent of Popular Involvement in Social Audit	143
Raising of Issues and Exposure of Grievances	143
Perceived Effectiveness of Social Audit.....	144
Overall Effectiveness of Monitoring Mechanism.....	145
Popular Monitoring in the two GPs : More Insights	145
INDIRECT ACCOUNTABILITY: ACCOUNTABILITY OF GP STAFF	150
Sanctioning Dimension	151
Monitoring Dimension	152
Decision Making Control	153
CONCLUSION	155
CHAPTER 5 ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE MADHYA PRADESH CASES.....	157
THE SANCTIONING DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY	157
Proportion of Contested Seats and Contestation of Sarpanch Seat	158
Degree of Electoral Defeat of Incumbent Representatives.....	163
Voter Turnout.....	164
Freeness of Elections	164
Overall Effectiveness of Sanctioning Mechanism	165
THE DELIBERATION DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY.....	166
Frequency of Gram Sabha Meetings.....	169
Extent of Attendance in Gram Sabha Meetings	170
Inclusiveness of Attendance in Gram Sabha Meetings	173
Inclusiveness of Gram Sabha Decision Making.....	175
Extent of Scrutiny of GP Functioning in Gram Sabha Meetings.....	177
Overall Effectiveness of Deliberative Mechanism	178
Gram Sabha Meetings: True Forums of Deliberative Democracy?	179
THE MONITORING DIMENSION OF ACCOUNTABILITY	186
Frequency of Social Audit.....	187
Extent of Popular Involvement in Social Audit	188
Raising of Issues and Exposure of Grievances	190
Perceived Effectiveness of Social Audit.....	190
Overall Effectiveness of Monitoring Mechanism.....	191
Popular Monitoring in the two GPs: More Insights	192
INDIRECT ACCOUNTABILITY: ACCOUNTABILITY OF GP STAFF	197
Sanctioning Dimension	198
Monitoring Dimension	198
Decision Making Control	199
CONCLUSION	201
CHAPTER 6 PERFORMANCE OF THE CHOSEN CASES IN THE TWO STATES	204
PERFORMANCE OF THE CHOSEN GPs OF WEST BENGAL	204
Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure.....	204
Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education.....	216
Overall Performance Assessment for the GPs of West Bengal.....	223

Villagers' Assessment of Overall GP Performance.....	223
PERFORMANCE OF THE CHOSEN GPs OF MADHYA PRADESH	226
Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure.....	226
Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education.....	236
Overall Performance Assessment for the GPs of Madhya Pradesh	241
Villagers' Assessment of Overall GP Performance.....	241
CONCLUSION	244
 CHAPTER 7 EXAMINING THE ACCOUNTABILITY-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP FOR THE WEST BENGAL STUDY 245	
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON PERFORMANCE	245
Impact of Different Accountability Dimensions on Performance	246
Aspects of Performance and their Relationship with Accountability.....	272
Overall Impact of Accountability on Performance.....	275
OTHER DETERMINANTS OF PERFORMANCE	276
Primary Determinants: Finances and Capacity.....	277
Secondary Determinant	297
CONCLUSION	301
 CHAPTER 8 EXAMINING THE ACCOUNTABILITY-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP FOR THE MADHYA PRADESH STUDY	311
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON PERFORMANCE	311
Impact of Different Accountability Dimensions on Performance	312
Aspects of Performance and their Relationship with Accountability.....	329
Overall Impact of Accountability on Performance.....	332
OTHER DETERMINANTS OF PERFORMANCE	333
Primary Determinants: Finances and Capacity.....	333
Secondary Determinant	353
CONCLUSION	355
 CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION	364
COMPARING THE FINDINGS OF THE WEST BENGAL AND MADHYA PRADESH STUDIES	364
Accountability.....	365
Performance.....	369
Accountability-Performance Relationship.....	370
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE	377
POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS	382
AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH	386
 Bibliography	390
Appendix	398

SUMMARY

The study of performance, in terms of an assessment of service delivery, is of pivotal importance in local government study. A study by Richard Crook and James Manor (1998) identifies accountability to the people as the most important cause, in a cluster of causes associated with successful local government performance. The belief that accountability to the people makes local government service delivery more effective and responsive to citizen desires is, according to Harry Blair (2000), the central premise behind experiments of democratic local governance. There is, therefore, a prevalent viewpoint that greater the accountability to the people, better will be the performance (service delivery) of local governments.

Available studies exploring the impact of accountability on local government performance suffer from certain methodological weaknesses such as the absence of careful operationalization of accountability, and the comparison of completely diverse cases with each other (instead of controlling important variables). In view of such weaknesses of the earlier studies, this study aims to re-examine the impact of accountability on local government performance by using an appropriate methodology. It defines accountability as popular control over local government, and carefully operationalizes it in terms of three dimensions of sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring. It carries out partially-controlled case comparison instead of directly comparing completely different cases. Furthermore, it gives due importance towards investigating the impact of other variables (capacity and finances) in order to uncover their salience (relative to accountability) as determinants of local government performance.

The study is set in India, and has been carried out in the two Indian states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Two Village Councils (*Gram Panchayats* or GPs)

have been selected as cases in each state and compared with each other. A two-fold approach has been employed to detect causality between accountability and performance in each state study. The components of this two-fold approach are (a) discovery of the association between accountability and performance (as evident from the results of the comparison between the two chosen cases or GPs) and (b) noting whether causal processes operate between accountability and performance within each case or GP. The drawing of conclusions for the entire study is done using the findings of both the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies.

On the basis of the findings of the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies, this study infers finances and capacity to be the salient determinants of local government (GP) performance. This study finds no evidence of accountability having a significant impact on GP performance. The impact of accountability on GP performance is highly constrained. The actual functioning of the accountability mechanisms in the chosen GPs is failing to fulfil mediating conditions (causal processes) through which a positive impact on performance could be brought about. The most important condition that is not fulfilled in this respect is performance-based sanctioning of incumbent local government representatives. Even the fulfilment of this condition, by itself, is likely to push up the performance of a local government only to a certain level. The importance of the availability of an adequate level of capacity and finances for achieving high levels of local government performance remains.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Selected Cases in Both States.....	87
Table 2: Dimensions of Accountability and their Indicators	92
Table 3: Dimensions and Indicators of Performance	98
Table 4: The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability: Effectiveness of Elections in the Two West Bengal GPs (2003 and 2008 <i>Panchayat</i> Elections)	113
Table 5: The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of <i>Gram Sansad</i> and <i>Gram Sabha</i> in the West Bengal GPs	122
Table 6: Attendance in Half-yearly and Annual <i>Gram Sansad</i> Meetings (2008-09).124	
Table 7: The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of Social Audit in the West Bengal GPs (2009-10).....	142
Table 8: The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability: Effectiveness of Elections in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2005 and 2010 <i>Gram Panchayat</i> Elections)	159
Table 9: The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of <i>Gram Sabha</i> in the Madhya Pradesh GPs	169
Table 10: The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of Social Audit in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2009-10).....	188
Table 11: Volume of NREGA Infrastructural Works Completed by the West Bengal GPs (2008-09)	206
Table 12: Effectiveness Ratios for Debipur GP for Various Programmes (2007-08)207	
Table 13: Effectiveness Ratios for Nowdapanur GP for Various Programmes (2007-08)	207
Table 14: Number of Completed and In-progress NREGA Works in the West Bengal GPs (2009-10)	209
Table 15: Villager Satisfaction with GP-provided Infrastructural Assets in the West Bengal GPs.....	211
Table 16: Availability of Basic Facilities of Alternative Primary Schools (SSKs) in West Bengal GPs.....	218
Table 17: Most Urgent Unfulfilled Needs of SSKs Perceived by Teachers.....	221

Table 18: Completed and Unfinished NREGA Works (for 2008-09 and 2009-10 combined) in the Madhya Pradesh GPs	228
Table 19: Infrastructural Works Done Under Programmes other than NREGA in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09).....	230
Table 20: Villager Satisfaction with GP-provided Infrastructural Assets in the Madhya Pradesh GPs	231
Table 21: Availability of Basic Facilities of Alternative Primary (EGS) Schools in Madhya Pradesh GPs.....	237
Table 22: Most Urgent Unfulfilled Needs of EGS Schools Perceived by Teachers ..	240
Table 23: Impact of Accountability Dimensions on Performance in the West Bengal GPs.....	276
Table 24: Overall Financial Strength of the West Bengal GPs (2008-09) in Indian Rupees (INR).....	277
Table 25: Financial Allocations Made under Different Programmes (2008-09) to the West Bengal GPs (in INR).....	278
Table 26: Own Source Revenue (OSR) of the West Bengal GPs (2008-09).....	280
Table 27: Aggregate Fund Utilization by the West Bengal GPs (2008-09)	283
Table 28: Association between Performance Determinants and Performance in the West Bengal Study	301
Table 29: Impact of Accountability Dimensions on Performance in the Madhya Pradesh GPs.....	332
Table 30: Overall Financial Strength of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09) in Indian Rupees (INR).....	334
Table 31: Financial Allocations made under Different Programmes (2008-09) to the Madhya Pradesh GPs (in INR).....	335
Table 32: NREGA and Non-NREGA Revenue and Expenditure of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09) in INR.....	335
Table 33: Own Source Revenue (OSR) of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09).....	337
Table 34: Aggregate Fund Utilization by the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09)	340
Table 35: Association between Performance Determinants and Performance in the Madhya Pradesh Study	355

GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS

<i>Adivasi Upayojana</i>	Programme for development of tribal areas
<i>Anganwadi Kendra</i>	Child care centre
<i>Artha o Parikalpana Upa-samiti</i>	Finance and Planning Committee of Village Council (West Bengal)
<i>Atigaribi</i>	Extremely poor
<i>Bhavan</i>	Building
<i>Dhyan-akarshan</i>	Drawing of attention
<i>Gaun Khanij Rashi</i>	Minor Mineral (Royalties) Fund
<i>Gram Nirman Samiti</i>	Village Construction Committee
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Village Council
<i>Gram Sabha</i>	Village Assembly
<i>Gram Sansad</i>	Village Constituency Assembly
<i>Gram Swaraj</i>	Village Self Rule
<i>Gram Unnayan Samiti</i>	Village Development Committee (West Bengal)
<i>Gram Vikas Samiti</i>	Village Development Committee (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Guruji</i>	Alternative Primary School teacher (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Indira Awas Yojana</i>	Central Government Housing Programme named after Indira Gandhi
<i>Janani Suraksha Yojana</i>	Central Government Programme for providing assistance for safe motherhood
<i>Janch Samiti</i>	Investigation Committee
<i>Janpad Panchayat</i>	Block level council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Karmadhyaksha</i>	Head of standing committee of <i>Panchayat Samiti</i>
<i>Karmee</i>	Worker
<i>Kutchra</i>	Seasonal or earthen (used for roads)
<i>Med bandhan</i>	Construction of boundary of plot of land
<i>Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra</i>	Alternative Middle School (West Bengal)
<i>Moolbhoot Yojana</i>	Basic Needs Programme
<i>Morum Road</i>	Kind of all-weather road, superior to earthen roads but inferior to brick, pitch or concrete roads
<i>Nal Jal Yojana</i>	Tap water programme
<i>Nirbahi Sahayak</i>	Executive Assistant
<i>Nirman Sahayak</i>	Construction Assistant
<i>Nirman tatha Vikas Samiti</i>	Construction and Development Committee of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Nirvirodh</i>	
<i>Nirvachan</i>	
<i>Puraskar Yojana</i>	Programme to Reward Uncontested Election
<i>Nyaya Panchayat</i>	Rural dispute resolution body possessing civil and minor criminal jurisdiction
<i>Paksh</i>	Ruler or ruling group
<i>Panch</i>	Elected representative of Village Council other than the chairperson (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Panchayat</i>	Rural local government or local council
<i>Panchayat Samiti</i>	Block level council (West Bengal)
<i>Para Baithak</i>	Neighbourhood meeting

<i>Pradhan</i>	Chairperson of Village Council (West Bengal)
<i>Prakashya Karmanyata</i>	Non-confidential performance report
<i>Pratibedan</i>	All-weather (as in roads), consisting of categories brick, pitch, and cement-concrete
<i>Pucca</i>	Pond excavation
<i>Pukur kata</i>	Custom of female seclusion
<i>Purdah</i>	A Hindu warrior caste of North, Central and North-western India
<i>Rajput</i>	Meeting
<i>Sabha</i>	Person presiding over meeting
<i>Sabhapati</i>	Secretary of Village Council (West Bengal)
<i>Sachib</i>	Secretary of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Sachiv</i>	Administrative assistant in Village Councils
<i>Sahayak</i>	Alternative primary school teacher (West Bengal)
<i>Sahayika</i>	General Administration Committee of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Samanya Prashasan Samiti</i>	Right of elected representatives to make proposals in Village Council meetings (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Sankalp</i>	Member of Parliament (Local Area Development Fund)
<i>Sansad Nidhi</i>	Chairperson of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Literally Child Education Centre. Refers to alternative primary school (West Bengal)
<i>Shishu</i>	Education and Health Committee of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Shiksha Kendra</i>	Digging work to recharge water supply of tube-wells
<i>Shiksha avam Swasthya Samiti</i>	Bureaucratic revenue official at the level of <i>tehsil</i> , an administrative unit much smaller than a district
<i>Sokhta Gaddha</i>	Deputy chairperson of Village Council (West Bengal)
<i>Tehsildar</i>	Committee of Village Council in a particular functional area (West Bengal)
<i>Upa-pradhan</i>	Deputy chairperson of Village Council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Upa-samiti</i>	Local Area Development Fund of Members of Legislative Assembly
<i>Up-sarpanch</i>	Opposition
<i>Vidhayak Nidhi</i>	District level council (Madhya Pradesh)
<i>Vipaksh</i>	District level council (West Bengal)
<i>Zila Panchayat</i>	
<i>Zilla Parishad</i>	

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AITC	All India Trinamool Congress
BDO	Block Development Officer
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BRGF	Backward Regions Grant Fund
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEO (JP)	Chief Executive Officer (<i>Janpad Panchayat</i>)
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
EDD	Empowered Deliberative Democracy
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
GP	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>
GUS	<i>Gram Unnayan Samiti</i>
IAY	Indira Awas Yojana
IGNOAPS	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
INC	Indian National Congress
INR	Indian Rupee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OSR	Own Source Revenue
PDO	<i>Panchayat</i> Development Officer
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
SC	Scheduled Caste
SHG	Self Help Group
SSK	<i>Shishu Shiksha Kendra</i>
ST	Scheduled Tribe
VMC	Vigilance and Monitoring Committee

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The study of performance, in terms of an assessment of service delivery, is of pivotal importance in local government study. As Putnam (1993) states regarding the need for performance assessment, "...institutional performance is important because in the end the quality of government matters to people's lives: scholarships are awarded, roads paved, children inoculated-or (if government fails) they are not" (Putnam 1993, 9). It is through service delivery that local governments make a difference to people's lives. This has special relevance to developing countries, such as India, where local governments carry out developmental and poverty alleviation functions. Local governments, after all, exist for serving local needs through appropriate service delivery.

Few empirical studies actually examine the factors behind successful local government performance (Putnam 1993; Crook and Manor 1998; Faguet 2006). Various contextual factors (such as favourable socio-economic, political and socio-cultural environments) and factors pertaining to the structure and actual operation of local governments (which are autonomy, accountability, capacity and finances) have been identified in various studies as the determinants of local government performance. However, autonomy, accountability, finances and capacity are the four major direct determinants of local government performance, whereas the contextual factors would indirectly affect local government performance by influencing one or more of the direct determinants. One study of local government performance, carried out by Richard Crook and James Manor, identifies accountability to the people as the most important

cause, in a cluster of causes associated with successful local government performance (Crook and Manor 1998).

The accountability of local governments is a desirable priority in its own right, because it allows local residents to have control over their representatives who make decisions that affect their lives. There has been an adoption of formal popular accountability mechanisms in local governments (such as elections and deliberative forums) in the wave of democratic decentralization in developing countries, with the aim to increase popular control over local governance. On the other hand, some scholars see accountability in local governance as not just desirable in itself, but also as leading to improvement in local government service delivery. The belief that accountability makes local government service delivery more effective and responsive to citizen desires is, according to Harry Blair, the central premise behind experiments of democratic local governance or democratic decentralization (Blair 2000, 21). Based on the above premise and on the findings of the study by Crook and Manor (1998), a viewpoint emerges that higher the level of accountability, better will be the performance (service delivery) of local government units.

The Crook and Manor (1998) study is the only known empirical study to explicitly comment on the overall relationship between accountability and performance. This study, however, falls short of carrying out a detailed exploration of the various causal processes through which accountability has an impact on local government performance. Other shortcomings of this study are the use of a comparative methodology that compares completely diverse cases with each other instead of controlling important variables, and the failure to precisely conceptualize and operationalize accountability.

There are other studies that make arguments about the accountability-performance linkage, though not in such explicit terms as the Crook and Manor (1998) study. These studies reveal insights about the impact of particular mechanisms of accountability, such as elections (Echeverri-Gent 1992; Fiszbein 1997; Faguet 2006; Majumdar 2009) or deliberative forums (Baiocchi 2001; Fung and Wright 2001; Heller 2001) on local government performance or particular aspects of such performance. However these studies suffer from the major weakness of random assessment of accountability because of the failure to develop precise operational indicators.

Therefore the examination of the accountability-performance relationship warrants a comprehensive empirical study that addresses the weaknesses of the available studies. There is a need to first assess accountability in a nuanced and systematic way, through appropriate operationalization, before making any inference about the relationship between accountability and performance. The impact of specific accountability mechanisms must be systematically explored to reveal the causal processes that operate between specific dimensions of accountability and performance. In addition, an appropriate method of comparison, that controls certain variables and allows variation in others, is also required so that comparison between cases can yield robust and fruitful insights.

Apart from the methodological weaknesses seen in the existing accountability-performance studies, some other reasons also lead one to question the literature's findings on accountability and performance. The findings of different studies on determinants of local government performance present a puzzle about the relative salience of finances, capacity, accountability and autonomy as performance determinants. The impact of the determinants of performance other than accountability

(such as capacity or finances) should be thoroughly investigated before ruling out their importance and identifying accountability as the most important determinant of performance. The study by Crook and Manor (1998) did not explore the impact of capacity on local government performance. There is a need for studies that explore the impact of the variables finances and capacity in a more careful and nuanced manner.

In contrast to the empirical studies already mentioned that argue about the positive impact of accountability (or specific accountability mechanisms) on local government performance, certain theoretical views caution that accountability (March and Olsen 1995; Hiskey 2010), or specific accountability mechanisms such as elections (Hickok 1995; Walsh 1996; Keefer and Khemani 2005) might not necessarily have a positive impact on performance or be able to solve all kinds of performance problems. Keefer and Khemani (2005) and Hickok (1995), for instance, highlight that competitive elections might fail to improve performance because of prevalent conditions such as popular voting on the basis of non-performance considerations like party loyalty and ethnic identity. Such theoretical views lead one to be critical about the findings of studies that argue about the positive and significant impact of accountability on local government performance. They lead us to recognize that the relationship between accountability and performance is complex, and subject to the operation of mediating conditions and intermediate processes. Any study of accountability and performance must make an attempt to explore such complexity and nuances in the relationship.

The above stated reasons point out that there is a need to re-examine the accountability-performance relationship with respect to local government, using an appropriate methodology and comparative techniques. In other words, the accountability-performance relationship needs to be subjected to careful empirical scrutiny, using methods that avoid the weaknesses of earlier studies. The essential

research question that arises is - *Does higher accountability lead to better local government performance?* This central (though broad) question will be explored in this study through the following specific questions:

Firstly, does accountability have a tangible impact on local government performance? In other words, do noticeable causal processes operate between accountability and performance?

Secondly, is accountability the most significant determinant of local government performance that explains performance variations between different local government units?

Thirdly, if accountability is not the most salient determinant of local government performance, then which variable/s best explain/s performance variations between different local government units?

In exploring and attempting to find answers to the above questions, this study gives due importance to the complexities operating in the accountability performance relationship. In other words, it attempts to unpack the complexities operating in the accountability-performance relationship. Having identified the significance of this study and the main research questions, this introductory chapter proceeds to develop the groundwork for the whole thesis. The remaining sections of this chapter describe the setting of the study, its objectives and expected contributions, the framework of relationships among the variables used, a brief methodological description, the structure of the thesis and a summary of the major findings.

Setting of the Study

The country chosen for this study is India. This study is set in India's *Panchayat* (rural local government) system, not in its urban local government system. In India,

Panchayat reforms were undertaken in the early 1990s because the lack of popular accountability in rural local government was seen as a major cause of inefficiency, leakages and corruption, and lack of responsiveness (Chaudhuri 2006, 162). Reformers felt that increasing the level of popular control over local governance would solve these problems. As a result, they introduced a variety of accountability mechanisms in rural local government. The importance given to increased accountability is evident in the institutionalization of regular elections and provision for Village Assembly meetings in India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which defines the general features of India's current *Panchayat* system. Given this background, India is one of the most suitable countries to investigate the accountability-performance relationship. The availability of a variety of local-level accountability mechanisms in India also makes it appropriate for comprehensively assessing local accountability and its impact on local government performance.

There is a great deal of diversity in the structure of rural local government among different Indian states, as each state has its own *Panchayat* Law. At the same time, the *Panchayat* Law of each state adheres to the basic principles of India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment, making the findings of different state studies comparable and mutually relatable to a certain extent. A high degree of variation in socio-economic and other contextual conditions (which influence the actual functioning of local government) also makes it suitable for comparative study. Beyond inter-state comparison, a comparison of local governments within a single state can offer valuable insights about the impact of contextual conditions in shaping the actual functioning of local government, since the structural features would be common or controlled for the local government units within that state. The common structural features would be defined by the *Panchayat* law of the concerned state.

Rural areas in most Indian states suffer from problems of poverty, illiteracy, and other forms of socio-economic backwardness that are typical of developing country contexts. Insights derived about the actual operation of rural local governments in India would therefore be applicable to certain degree to other developing country contexts (such as those in South Asia and Africa).

Finally, since 1993, Indian states such as West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka have devolved decision making and implementation powers (for certain functional areas such as infrastructure development) and a certain degree of financial autonomy to their rural local governments. This makes rural local governments in these states more suitable for assessing their performance, compared to the past situation when these bodies lacked powers or finances to carry out autonomous service delivery. Rural local governments in Indian states are responsible for implementing central and state government development programmes (such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, and State Finance Commission funds) but they do have freedom to choose specific projects under these programmes and to implement them. The two Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have been chosen for this study.

Objectives and Expected Contribution

While the findings of this study are most relevant for the Indian context, as already stated, they may be applicable to a certain degree to other developing countries. This study has some major objectives:

Firstly, the study aims to discover the nature of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government in the chosen Indian states. It proposes to uncover the salience of accountability as a determinant of local government

performance, as well as specific causal processes through which accountability actually has, or fails to have, an impact on performance. This study essentially aims to critically re-examine, through a carefully chosen methodology, the taken-for-granted viewpoint that higher accountability leads to better local government performance.

Secondly, this study aims to shed light on the most significant determinant of local government performance in the two Indian states under consideration. It expects to find out if accountability, or any other determinant such as finances or capacity, explains variation in performance among different local governments.

The methodological strategies employed in this study in pursuit of the above stated objectives, are likely to result in certain contributions to the existing literature. These potential contributions pertain to three domains of literature, comprising the accountability-performance relationship literature, the local government performance literature, and the local accountability literature (discussed below).

Accountability-Performance Relationship Literature

This study expects to enrich the literature that covers the accountability-performance relationship in local government. It is designed to contribute an empirically based, insightful and nuanced analysis to this literature through the employment of appropriate methodological strategies.

Firstly, this study expects to offer meaningful insights on the accountability-performance relationship by employing suitable and precise conceptualizations and operationalizations of both accountability and performance. It recognizes the distinct nature of local accountability (compared to common public accountability). It accordingly uses a conceptualization of accountability that goes beyond mere answerability, and possesses operational dimensions to capture a

comprehensive notion of accountability as popular control. Performance is operationalized in terms of objective and subjective, quantity-based and quality-based indicators to provide a thorough assessment of service delivery. Such conceptualization and operationalization is also expected to generate a less random measurement of these variables, resulting in a robust analysis to explain the relationship between accountability and performance.

Secondly, this study explores the causal processes involved in the accountability performance relationship to show evidence of how accountability creates, or fails to create, an impact on performance. The exploration of the interaction between the specific dimensions of accountability and performance, and the complex processes transpiring between these variables, should yield a more refined understanding of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government.

Thirdly, through the use of an appropriate comparative methodology, this study expects to contribute to the literature robust and generalizable findings regarding the accountability-performance relationship. For the sake of robustness, this study avoids directly comparing with each other completely different cases, and carries out partially-controlled comparison of local governments within a particular state. For the sake of generalizability, final conclusions of the study are drawn on the basis of the findings from the comparisons carried out in two states (that differ from each other in structural features of local government).

Finally, this study expects to bridge the gap between theoretical speculations about the relationship between accountability and performance and the empirical reality of the relationship with respect to local governments. The theoretical literature on democratic governance (World Bank 1992; March and Olsen 1995) and local government (Walsh 1996) provide theoretical hypotheses that point to the possible

causal links that exist between these variables. This study expects to provide empirical evidence to uphold, modify or reject these hypotheses, with specific reference to the reality of rural local government in the Indian states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

Local Government Performance Literature

This study expects to contribute to the empirical literature on the determinants of local government performance, by making use of a multi-pronged and innovative methodology, and overcoming the methodological shortcomings of existing studies. Some existing studies carry out a cross-country or cross-case comparison of local government performance, but they actually compare totally diverse cases (Crook and Manor 1998; Crook and Sverrisson 2001) which affects the robustness of findings to some extent.¹ This study attempts to avoid the problem of comparing totally different cases by carrying out an intra-state comparison of local government performance in each of the two states selected, in which a crucial variable--autonomy (the extent of powers of local government, as defined by the law)--is controlled. Examining the inferences from the two state studies should lead to more generalizable conclusions on the relative significance of different performance determinants.

Local Accountability Literature

Accountability in this study is measured in terms of the effectiveness of formal accountability mechanisms of local government, corresponding to three accountability dimensions of deliberation, monitoring and sanctioning. This study hopes to contribute to the literature on the actual functioning of formal accountability mechanisms of local

¹However, some studies of local government performance such as Putnam (1993) and Faguet (2006) use controlled comparison.

government such as elections and deliberative forums. The comparison of actual accountability levels between different local governments in the same state should demonstrate the differential operation of the accountability mechanism (having the same legal or structural features) in different socio-economic or political contexts. On the other hand, insights on the impact of the differing legal features of accountability mechanisms such as elections and deliberative forums are expected to be generated by comparing the findings of the two different state studies set in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. By investigating the role of formal accountability mechanisms in actually creating popular control, and the impact of such control on service delivery, this study also hopes to shed light on the actual usefulness of formal accountability mechanisms, which constitute an important aspect of the structural design of local government experiments.

Analytical Framework: Variables and their Relationships

The analytical framework of variables used in this study consists of the dependent variable and the independent variables likely to affect the dependent variable. The dependent variable is local government performance, and there are three primary independent variables--accountability, capacity, and finances--and one secondary independent variable.² In the actual empirical study, one or two of the three primary independent variables will be uncovered as the most important determinant/s of performance, the one/s that explain variation in performance between the two cases compared in each state.

²The primary and secondary independent variables used in this study all constitute direct determinants of local government performance. Contextual factors, which indirectly affect performance, have not been included as separate variables in the framework of this study, though the way they shape direct determinants is analyzed in the study.

The Dependent Variable: Local Government Performance

Local government performance is defined in terms of the service delivery carried out by local government. Since the lowest tier of local government (Village Council) is the unit of analysis in this study, local government performance in this study means Village Council performance. Such performance is evaluated in two functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. Performance in the area of infrastructure is assessed in terms of effectiveness (measured by the ratios of actual output to targeted output, and of completed works to works actually taken up for implementation) and popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets. Performance in the area of alternative primary education is assessed in terms of the degree to which the Village Council fulfils its role in providing basic facilities (such as buildings, classroom and toilets) to alternative primary schools. Chapter 3 presents further details about the operational dimensions and indicators employed in this study to measure performance.

Primary Independent Variables: Accountability, Finances, Capacity

Accountability, capacity, autonomy and finances are the four major possible determinants of local government performance. These four variables are stated by Manor (1999, 55) to be the four crucial conditions for successful service delivery by decentralized local institutions (see Chapter 2). The extent of autonomy, which this author interprets as the extent of the powers held by local governments as defined by the law, is similar for both the Village Councils being compared in each state selected for study. Therefore, autonomy cannot explain variation in performance between the Village Councils in each state, and thus the study focuses on the three other primary determinants. Out of accountability, capacity and finances, one or two might be more important than the other/s in explaining variations in local government performance.

Each variable is briefly described below, in terms of its components (dimensions and indicators) and the possible causal processes through which it can have an impact on performance.

Accountability

This study explores the impact of all the three possible determinants stated above, but there is special emphasis in exploring the impact of accountability on local government performance. Accountability is defined in this study as the degree of popular control that people (local residents) can exercise on their local government (Village Council).

As already stated in this chapter, the belief that accountability makes for better service delivery is the main premise underlying experiments of democratic local governance (Blair 2000). Besides, the study by Crook and Manor (1998) identifies accountability to be the most significant determinant of local government performance, and other studies argue about the positive impact of specific accountability mechanisms on local government performance. These premises and arguments provide us with general hypotheses about the relationship between accountability and performance. The actual testing of these hypotheses however requires that accountability should be broken down into operational dimensions and indicators that would be more amenable to empirical examination. This is necessary for a more precise assessment of accountability, and of the impact of accountability on performance. This study borrows Joy Moncrieffe's idea of accountability as having three dimensions--sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring (Moncrieffe 2001). These operational dimensions are also consistent with the institutional framework of rural local government in Indian states, characterized by the availability of accountability mechanisms corresponding to each of these dimensions.

The sanctioning dimension of accountability is assessed in terms of the actual effectiveness of the sanctioning mechanism (elections), through which people can evaluate, and punish or reward, their incumbent Village Council representatives/ruling group, or evaluate contesting candidates to choose one over another. The deliberation dimension is assessed in terms of the actual effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism (Village Assembly meetings) which channelizes popular demands into the decisions of the Village Council. The monitoring dimension is evaluated in terms of the actual effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism (Social Audit) which is meant to involve local residents in scrutinizing and reviewing the actual functioning of the Village Council. The specific indicators of each of these three dimensions can be read in Chapter 3.

Each dimension of accountability is supposed to improve local government performance through certain causal pathways. In other words, each accountability dimension has to fulfil certain mediating conditions in order to have a positive impact on local government performance. As already stated, the study that comments on the overall relationship between accountability and performance (Crook and Manor 1998) does not delineate the specific causal processes through which accountability improves performance. Therefore, this study borrows hypotheses about the possible causal pathways from the literature on the impact of particular accountability mechanisms on performance (for details see Chapter 2). These hypotheses will be subjected to empirical scrutiny in the chosen cases of this study.

The sanctioning dimension (assessed in terms of the degree of competitiveness of elections) can have an impact in three possible ways: (a) through pressure imposed by the impending possibility or high likelihood of electoral defeat of incumbent representatives contesting re-election, which compels them and the ruling group to

increase their efforts towards improving Village Council performance (b) through increased chances of worthy, talented election candidates being chosen over other election candidates (c) through generation of a numerically strong and assertive opposition group that keeps the ruling group alert to its shortcomings and pressurizes it to perform better.

The deliberation dimension can possibly improve one aspect of Village Council performance (the congruence of service delivery with popular demand) by bringing about a more widespread expression of popular demands, which in turn can possibly lead to a better reflection of popular demands in Village Council decision making. The monitoring dimension can possibly result reduce wastage of funds (by exposing such wastage and financial irregularities) and can lead to funds being utilized for productive ends, thus improving Village Council performance. It may also result in exposure of other performance shortcomings (such as delay in completing projects or poor quality of construction work) and consequent correction of such shortcomings by the Village Council.

Finances: Strength and Composition

The importance of adequate financial resources for carrying out service delivery is obvious, though questions have been raised in some studies as to whether financial strength, by itself, can assure good local government performance (see Chapter 2). For a systematic assessment of the impact of this factor, this study uses precise indicators related to finances. Aggregate financial strength is employed as one indicator, of which both revenue side and expenditure side measures are employed. Aggregate revenue and expenditure are divided by population of each chosen Village Council to facilitate comparison of financial strength between Village Councils. An indicator on the

composition of finances is also included, since the availability or non-availability of suitable fund sources can have possible implications for Village Council performance.

This study subjects the widely assumed importance of financial strength to scrutiny by including an indicator on the actual rate of utilization of available financial resources (which indicates the proportion of aggregate income spent). The assessment of this indicator can offer crucial insights on how important financial strength is by itself. If a particular Village Council has a much lower utilization of resources compared to the other, then it means that variables other than financial strength are more significant in explaining performance variations.

Capacity

Mere financial resource availability, in the absence of local government capacity, might not be sufficient to significantly improve local government performance. Such capacity is likely to influence, in a notable way, the local government's ability to utilize available funds, and thus have an impact on local government performance.

Capacity of Village Councils has various components. On the basis of studies by Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) and Talbott (2010), human resources and their management (human resource capacity), financial management and leadership are chosen as components of capacity. Human resource capacity consists of the abilities and efforts of the elected members and staff of Village Councils. It embodies an element of human resource management, since human resource capacity, in this study, refers to the extent to which human resources are mobilized or utilized. Material capacity is added to these components as another element of capacity; it comprises the equipment and facilities of the Village Council office or establishment.

Secondary Independent Variable: Preferences of Decision Makers

In addition to the three possible primary performance determinants stated above, one secondary determinant is likely to have an impact on Village Council performance. However its impact is more subtle, and less fundamental and obvious, than that of the primary independent variables. The preferences of Village Council decision makers constitute the secondary independent variable of this study.

Village Council performance is possibly shaped to a certain extent by the behaviour, and in turn, by the preferences, of decision makers not only at the level of Village Council but also at the higher levels (such as district and block). The preferences of decision makers at the Village Council level may affect the inclusiveness of decision making, which in turn may have a bearing on local government performance. The preferences of decision makers at higher levels may also have a subtle impact on local government performance, because co-operation and assistance provided by the higher tiers can contribute to better performance of the Village Council.

Methodology and Case Selection

This study may be characterized as a small n-study (since it explores a small number of cases) and the methodology used is case comparison with qualitative analysis. The study is set in the two Indian states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Two Village Councils (known as *Gram Panchayats* in India) have been selected in each state and compared with each other. The two *Gram Panchayats* (GPs) in each state have been selected to contrast each other on the level of electoral competition. Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP are the two selected GPs in West Bengal. Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP have been picked for study in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Three levels of analysis are employed in the study: the first level is within-case analysis of each GP (to enable tracing of causal processes between accountability and performance). The second level is comparison between the two chosen GPs of each state (to discover the association between accountability, as well as the other performance determinants, with GP performance) and the third level is drawing of conclusions for the study, considering the findings of both the state studies.

Data for the study is gathered using structured survey interview of villagers, semi-structured elite interview (mainly of elected representatives and bureaucrats), and document analysis of local government records. Qualitative data analysis has been carried out to process the data and draw inferences.

While this study employs a qualitative methodology, it is inspired in one sense by quantitative methodology: this inspiration reflects in the construction of specific dimensions and indicators to assess variables, for the sake of precision. Accountability, performance and the other crucial variables of the study have been measured in terms of precise dimensions and/or indicators to prevent random assessment. A two-fold approach, comprising discovery of association between independent and dependent variables, and assessment of evidence of causal processes between them, has been employed to investigate the relationship between accountability and performance and reveal the salient determinants of local government performance.

This study relies on cross-sectional variation (comparing different cases at a given point in time) rather than temporal variation (comparing different time periods). Data gathering (field research) for this study has been conducted between August 2009 and April 2010 in the two states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

The entire methodology of this study is aimed to generate an analysis that is nuanced and robust, and findings that are generalizable. The study does however

possess certain methodological shortcomings: notable among these are the drawing of conclusions on the basis of a small number of cases, and the small sample size of the villager survey. Chapter 3 contains a detailed account of the research design and methodology of this study, including its methodological limitations.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis starts with the preliminary tasks of reviewing the literature (Chapter 2) and laying down the details of the research design and methodology adopted (Chapter 3). The findings from the empirical studies carried out in the two states are presented in Chapter 4 to Chapter 8. Chapters 4 and 5 provide the empirical findings on the assessment of accountability in the cases (GPs) of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh respectively. Chapter 6 is concerned with an assessment of performance in the chosen cases for the two state studies. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 are about the inference of the accountability-performance relationship for the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies, and Chapter 9 provides final conclusions of the study based on the findings of the two constituent state studies.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to accountability and performance in local government. The local government performance literature throws up a puzzle as to which determinant of local government performance is most salient. While the study by Crook and Manor (1998) identifies accountability as the most important determinant of performance, such a finding cannot be accepted in an unquestioned way. This is because the extensive review of the literature on the accountability-performance relationship (including the Crook and Manor study) reveals that the available empirical studies suffer from significant weaknesses. These include the lack of proper operationalization of accountability and performance, failure to use proper methods of

comparison and inability to examine the causal processes between accountability and performance. The review of the literature concludes showing the need for a study possessing a convincing methodology to study the accountability-performance relationship and discover the salient determinants of local government performance.

Chapter 3 clarifies the methodological components of this study. It starts off with a description of case selection principles and identification of cases chosen in each state. The three levels of analysis (within-case, comparison of cases within each state, and final drawing of conclusions using findings from two state studies) are then explained. Following this is an account of the conceptualizations and multi-dimensional operationalizations of accountability and performance adopted in this study. The sources of data for the study and the methods of data analysis and inference used are then elaborated, concluding with an identification of the weaknesses and promise of the employed methodology.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on measuring and comparing accountability in the chosen local government units of West Bengal. The two chosen GPs in West Bengal are compared with each other with respect to three dimensions of accountability, viz. sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring. The sanctioning dimension is assessed with respect to the actual functioning of elections, most crucially with respect to electoral competition. Since West Bengal has party-based rural local government elections, the proportion of seats held by the ruling party of the GP is used as the main indicator of electoral competition. In assessing the actual functioning of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad* (Village Constituency Assembly) meetings, the GPs are compared with each other on several indicators including extent and inclusiveness of attendance, and inclusiveness of decision making. On the monitoring dimension, the GPs are compared with each other with respect to the effectiveness of Social Audit. Having

noted variations between the two West Bengal GPs on each accountability dimension, a final assessment of overall accountability is carried out to infer which GP has higher aggregate accountability.

Chapter 5 assesses and compares accountability in the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh. The structure of the chapter is the same as Chapter 4, its components being measuring three dimensions of accountability (in terms of the actual effectiveness of corresponding accountability mechanisms), detecting variation between the GPs on each dimension, and carrying out a cumulative assessment of accountability. There are some unique legal features of the accountability mechanisms in Madhya Pradesh, given that West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh have their own, distinct local government laws. Given that elections in Madhya Pradesh GPs are not party-based, the proportion of GP members elected in a contested manner is used as the relevant indicator of electoral competition, in the assessment of the sanctioning dimension. While village constituency level *Gram Sansad* meetings are the deliberative mechanism for West Bengal GPs, Madhya Pradesh has single-village level *Gram Sabha* meetings as deliberative forums. The procedure of Social Audit, as carried out in Madhya Pradesh GPs, also differs in some ways from that in West Bengal GPs.

Chapter 6 is concerned with an assessment of performance in the chosen cases of each state, and comparison of such performance between them. Performance is assessed in two functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. On each functional area, the two GPs of each state are compared with each other to detect variation (which GP performs better). The indicators used in the area of infrastructure are the physical output-based measure of effectiveness and the perception-based measure of people's satisfaction with infrastructural assets. In the area of alternative primary education, the indicators used relate to the availability of essential facilities

such as buildings, classrooms and drinking water sources in alternative primary schools, given that GPs have the responsibility of providing such facilities to these schools. On the basis of this analysis, there is an identification of the GP, in each state, that has higher performance than the other.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 explore the accountability-performance relationship and the relative salience of the different primary determinants of local government performance. Chapter 7 deals with the West Bengal study and Chapter 8 with the Madhya Pradesh study. The first part of each chapter delves into the impact of each accountability dimension on GP performance, looking at the association between each dimension and overall performance, and the fulfilment of causal processes between that dimension and performance. The overall association between accountability and performance (as revealed by the inter-GP comparison in each state) and the cumulative evidence from the causal processes are used to yield an inference about the impact of accountability on GP performance. The latter parts of Chapters 7 and 8 assess the impact of other possible performance determinants (capacity, finances and the secondary determinants) on performance. The entire analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 is geared towards uncovering whether accountability has a tangible impact on GP performance, and the salience of accountability as a performance determinant. If accountability variations are found to be inadequate in explaining performance variations, then there is an identification of the variable/s that best explain/s performance variations between the two chosen GPs in each state.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by drawing final inferences about the accountability-performance relationship and the salient determinants of local government performance, by comparing and contrasting the findings of the two comparative state studies. This chapter lays down the major academic and policy

contributions of the thesis. It concludes by identifying the possible future avenues of research which can further illuminate our understanding of the relationship between local government accountability and performance.

Findings and Main Argument

In the West Bengal study, one GP was found to have better aggregate performance while the other GP did better on aggregate accountability. Debipur GP was found to be the better performing GP, on the basis of its superior performance in both the chosen functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. However, Debipur GP had lower aggregate accountability than the other selected GP, Nowdapanur GP. Nowdapanur GP had higher aggregate accountability because it did better on two out of three dimensions of accountability, sanctioning (because of higher electoral competitiveness) and deliberation (due to its higher and more inclusive *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance). Therefore accountability does not appear to explain better GP performance for the West Bengal study.

Evidence from the functioning of causal processes also reveal the insignificant impact of the existing accountability mechanisms on performance in the West Bengal cases, most notably the insufficient impact of the crucial sanctioning dimension on performance. Competitive elections are failing to push GPs towards better performance mainly because electoral defeat or success of members who do contest re-election is not linked to performance considerations. Financial strength and capacity are found to be the determinants that explain superior GP performance in the successful case. Capacity is found to be an especially critical factor in explaining performance differences between the two West Bengal GPs, because of its role in explaining the much higher fund utilization in the successful case.

Unlike in the West Bengal study, the Madhya Pradesh GP that had better performance also had higher aggregate accountability. In the state of Madhya Pradesh, Goutampur Colony GP was found to be the better performing GP, on the basis of its overall superior functioning in both the functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. Goutampur Colony GP had higher aggregate accountability due to its better situation on the deliberation dimension - it had higher and more inclusive *Gram Sabha* attendance and more regular *Gram Sabha* meetings (compared to the very poor situation with respect to the same in the other chosen GP, Ramgarh GP) - and also better functioning of the monitoring mechanism (Social Audit). In the Madhya Pradesh study, the GP with higher aggregate accountability (Goutampur Colony GP) was actually behind the other (Ramgarh GP) on the sanctioning dimension because of non-existent electoral competition. However, the dismal record of Ramgarh GP with respect to the deliberation and monitoring dimensions, together with its not-so-impressive levels of overall electoral competition, meant that Ramgarh GP had to be assessed as being lower on aggregate accountability.

In the Madhya Pradesh study, the finding of the same GP possessing both better aggregate accountability and better performance does not indicate necessary causality between accountability and performance. Mere association, without evidence of causal processes between the two variables, is not conclusive of a causal relationship between them. As in the West Bengal study, evidence from the Madhya Pradesh cases on the operation of causal processes also reveals the insignificant impact of the existing accountability mechanisms on performance. For instance, the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha* has a relatively marginal impact on GP functioning. Even in Goutampur GP (whose *Gram Sabha* has relatively higher effectiveness) it mainly acts as a forum of providing information to the people about the rules of government welfare programmes.

In Ramgarh GP, which has relatively more competitive elections, elections did not have an impact on GP performance because no incumbent representative sought re-election. This resulted in the absence of pressure on the GP and its members to perform well. As in the West Bengal study, finance and capacity are found to be the crucial determinants of GP performance in the Madhya Pradesh study as well. In the Madhya Pradesh study, fund composition and capacity together explain performance variations between the two chosen cases.

This study therefore shows that there is no evidence of accountability having a significant impact on performance in the chosen local governments. The accountability mechanisms are creating a degree of popular control, but such control is not having a tangible impact on local government performance. The impact of accountability on GP performance is highly constrained, since the actual functioning of the accountability mechanisms is failing to fulfil mediating conditions (causal processes) through which such impact could be brought about. The most notable reason for such constrained impact is that the sanctioning mechanism of elections (which potentially could have had the greatest impact) is failing to improve performance because (a) either it does not provide the opportunity to actually sanction incumbents because they hardly stand for re-election or (b) even when incumbents do stand for re-election, their punishment/rewarding by voters is not linked to performance considerations.

The most significant way through which accountability can have an impact on local government performance is through competitive elections in which sanctioning of candidates is linked to performance considerations. Such impact, by itself, is however likely to push up local government performance only to a certain level. The importance of the availability of an adequate level of capacity and finances for achieving high performance levels remains. Capacity is especially important because it is critical for

effective utilization of available finances. When the capacity and financial position of a local government are at a poor level, accountability can improve performance only to a limited extent.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The institution of local government has been identified by different authors as having different purposes, justifications and benefits. While some traditional local government theorists have argued that the essential rationale of local government lies in enhancing democracy, others have argued that local government is essentially an instrument for achieving greater efficiency in service delivery.

Liberal democratic theorists such as Alexis de Tocqueville, J.S. Mill and Bryce stress that the true value of local government lies in promoting democracy. John Stuart Mill's seminal arguments view that local governments play an essential role in promoting democracy, because they provide wider opportunities for local residents to participate in public affairs, and thus perform the important role of educating citizens in the art of politics and government (Mill 1911; cited in Stoker 1996, 5). Local government was for Mill, "a school of political responsibility" (Hill 1974, 28). Thinkers such as Tocqueville and Bryce have also hailed the democracy-promoting role of local government (Pinto 2000). According to Tocqueville, "A nation may establish a free government, but without municipal institutions, it cannot have the spirit of liberty" (Tocqueville 1835; cited in Pinto 2000).

While British liberal democratic thinkers such as Mill see the democratic role of local government lying in promoting civic education, American democratic thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson see such a role lying in the expression of individual sovereignty and the right of the individual to participate in and determine local affairs (Wolman 1996). According to the Jefferson, the role of local government is to reflect the will of the people. Jefferson thus advocated direct democracy at the local level, so

that all citizens could play a part in decision making. Such heightened citizen role, according to Jefferson, could be achieved in a system of small wards known as 'little republics' (Wolman 1996).

While the above theorists see the main value of local government in promoting democracy, there are other theorists who view that the main role of local government is to provide efficient service delivery, rather than democracy. One such view is the utilitarian view, elaborated by Bentham and his followers. According to the utilitarian view, local government is an instrument of greater efficiency in service delivery (Stoker 1996). Langrod (1953; cited in Hill 1974) saw local government as an instrument of administrative efficiency, rather than of democracy, since he believed that the dominance of sectional interests at the local level reduces the benefits of democracy. Mill also believed in the efficiency benefits of local government; he believed that local interest, knowledge and capacity to oversee were all conducive to efficient and effective service provision (Mill 1911; cited in Stoker 1996). Unlike thinkers such as Bentham and Langrod, Mill gave equal importance to the efficiency role of service provision and to the democratic role of local government (Mill 1861; cited in Stoker 1996); he believed that local government can promote both democracy and efficiency.

An advocacy of the benefits of local government logically translates into an advocacy of decentralization in some form. Decentralization is the transfer of powers and functions from higher tiers of government (such as national or provincial governments) to local governments. In the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of academic studies on decentralization. Some of these studies are cross-country (Crook and Manor 1998; Huther and Shah 1998; Blair 2000; Crook and Sverrisson 2001; Heller 2001) while others are set in a single country or province (Echeverri-Gent 1992; Fiszbein 1997; McCarten and Vyasulu 2004, 2006; Azfar,

Livingston, and Meagher 2006; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006a; Faguet 2006; Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath 2006). The empirical literature on decentralization is essentially concerned with the evaluation of the actual functioning of local government units to which powers and finances have been transferred. This literature may be seen as a backdrop for the specific literature dealing with local government accountability and performance, the main variables of this study.

A central and abiding concern of the decentralization literature is service delivery by local governments, especially in terms of the congruence of service delivery with the preferences of local residents. Such congruence has been termed ‘allocative efficiency’ by some scholars (Tiebout 1956) and ‘responsiveness’ by others (Crook and Manor 1998; Crook and Sverrisson 2001). Different views on how such congruence of services with local preferences may be achieved have been proposed, corresponding to the contextual diversities between developed and developing countries.

The traditional literature on decentralization, mostly applicable to the context of USA and other developed nations, has been referred to as the “fiscal federalism” literature (Oates 1972; cited in Bardhan 2002). Scholars of fiscal federalism such as Wallace Oates advocate decentralization as a superior means of achieving allocative efficiency, given that people’s preferences are heterogeneous and there is no spillover across jurisdictions (Oates 1972; cited in Bardhan 2002). The famous Tiebout model constitutes the fulcrum of the fiscal federalism literature. This model relies on the assumption that individuals can achieve a match between their own preferences and the services offered by local government units by moving to the jurisdiction of that local government whose services best satisfy their preferences (Tiebout 1956).

The Tiebout model is not readily applicable to the situation of local governments in developing countries because local residents in developing countries

lack inter-jurisdictional mobility, and also because the model takes for granted that individuals can pressurize their local governments effectively to deliver services in accordance with their preferences (Litvack, Ahmed, and Bird 1998; Bardhan 2002). The fiscal federalism theory assumes that accountability (popular control) exists in the presence of local elections. In developing country contexts, however, accountability may be at a low level in spite of the presence of local elections. The actual operation of accountability mechanisms such as elections might not necessarily create a high degree of accountability in such contexts, and such accountability might not necessarily have an impact on service delivery. Therefore, there is a need to go far beyond the fiscal federalism framework when exploring service delivery in local government in developing country contexts.

Accountability has been of major interest to researchers of decentralization in developing countries, both as a concern in its own right and as a condition behind responsive, equitable service delivery. Therefore local government performance (service delivery) and accountability are two pivotal concerns of the decentralization literature dealing with developing countries.

This chapter shall review in detail the literature on local government performance, local accountability, and the relationship between local government accountability and performance. The structure of the chapter is as follows: the first section reviews the literature on local accountability. Following this is an examination of the literature on local government performance, consisting of the review of the conceptualization and measurement of performance and the determinants of local government performance. Keeping with the main focus of this thesis, an extensive review of the accountability-performance relationship follows, evaluating both theoretical and empirical studies on the topic. The review highlights the contribution

and weaknesses of the past studies and proposes the need for a study using proper methodologies for the investigation of this relationship.

Local Accountability: Concept and Mechanisms

This section reviews the literature on local accountability in two parts, first the conceptual literature and then the literature on mechanisms of local accountability. The latter part evaluates the studies on the actual effectiveness of various mechanisms of local accountability.

The Concept of Accountability

Pranab Bardhan and Dilip Mookherjee state that accountability can be defined in two alternative ways – in terms of the ‘nature of the political process’ (the political view) or in terms of the ‘outcomes induced’ (the economic view) (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006b, 5). The former view is concerned with popular control or popular pressure exerted on officials by citizens. The latter is concerned with the government’s distribution of resources among different groups in society in accordance with their demographic size or intensity of need (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006b, 5-7). This study, however, is only concerned with the former process-based definition, and not the latter outcome-based definition of accountability.

The basic idea embedded in the concept of accountability is control of accountability ‘holdees’ (Romzek and Dubnick 1998) or agents by accountability ‘holders’ or principals. In other words, accountability involves mechanisms that allow principles to pressurize their agents to act in accordance with their preferences (Philp 2009). In a democratic form of government, people are the principles, and elected

representatives are their agents.³ Such control of agents by principles is commonly understood in terms of answerability (Shafritz 1988; Caiden 1989; Romzek and Dubnick 1998; Mulgan 2000). Romzek and Dubnick (1998) define accountability as “a relationship in which an individual or agency is held to answer for performance that involves some delegation of authority to act.” Monitoring to see that performance expectations are being met, and sanctioning (punishing) agents for not following expectations are therefore the two key dimensions of accountability, as seen in the traditional conceptualization. Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin (1999) identify sanctioning as the cornerstone of accountability of elected representatives to the people, since it is only through sanctioning that citizens can retain in office those incumbents who meet their expectations, and remove from office those who do not.

As seen above, the answerability conception yields two key dimensions of accountability – monitoring and sanctioning. Moncrieffe (2001) however has criticized definitions of accountability that are limited to answerability. Moncrieffe’s conception of accountability goes beyond these two dimensions to include another important dimension known as ‘deliberation and consultation’. Moncrieffe feels that accountability in a wider and more meaningful sense will result only when the people, who are the accountability holders, have some means of making their preferences heard so that representatives may consider such preferences when they make decisions. This implies the importance of mechanisms of deliberation and consultation. Such mechanisms can function as forums of interaction between representatives and the people and can allow people to express their views, problems and priorities. The deliberation and consultation dimension of accountability suggested by Moncrieffe has special relevance for local accountability. The small size of jurisdictions in local

³While the elected representatives are agents of the people, bureaucrats are the agents of elected representatives in democratic forms of government.

government makes the use of deliberative means of accountability feasible. Furthermore, the actual reality of local government in some countries is characterized by the use of deliberative mechanisms (such as public meetings or village assemblies) to reflect popular preferences in decision making.

Local Accountability: Mechanisms and Actual Functioning

Accountability in this thesis means popular accountability of local governments, i.e. accountability of local governments to the people. Therefore the focus of this literature review is popular accountability, rather than upward accountability of local governments to higher tiers of government. While upward accountability is not an area of focus in this study, such accountability is significant in the sense that it does have a likely impact on local government performance. Devas and Grant (2003, 315) argue that upward accountability, though inimical to the downward accountability of local councils to the people, is probably having a greater impact on the performance of local councils in Uganda and Kenya than accountability to the people through the means of elections.

Popular accountability of local governments has two aspects – direct accountability (of elected representatives to the people), and indirect accountability (of bureaucrats/staff members to elected representatives). Studies such as Crook and Manor (1998), Blair (2000), and Devas and Grant (2003) have assessed such accountability in local governments of developing countries and pointed to its significance for overall accountability.⁴ The lack of effective control of elected representatives over bureaucrats, the continuing effective accountability of bureaucrats to line departments of central or provincial governments rather than to local councils,

⁴Crook and Manor (1998) use the term ‘institutional accountability’ instead of ‘indirect accountability’.

and bureaucratic resistance to the wishes of elected representatives are themes highlighted in these studies. The decentralization experiment in the Indian state of Karnataka is however seen as an exception, where effective accountability of bureaucrats to elected representatives of local councils could be established (Crook and Manor 1998; Blair 2000). This thesis is mainly concerned with direct accountability and has dealt with indirect accountability briefly; hence the indirect accountability literature is not explored in detail in this review of existing studies.

A major theme in the literature on local accountability is the identification of mechanisms of popular accountability and their effectiveness in different contexts. Blair (2000) in his six-country analysis of democratic local governance in Bolivia, Honduras, India (state of Karnataka), Mali, Philippines, and Ukraine, identifies elections, political parties, civil society, the media, public meetings, formal grievance redressal procedures and opinion surveys as the direct accountability mechanisms of local government. Elections, formal grievance redressal procedures and public meetings are formal accountability mechanisms whereas political parties, civil society, the media and opinion surveys constitute the informal mechanisms of accountability. This section reviews the literature on specific mechanisms of local accountability, focusing specially on three types of formal mechanisms--elections, deliberative mechanisms (public meetings or village assemblies) and monitoring mechanisms (Social Audit)--that are relevant for this study.

Elections

There is a division of views among authors with respect to the effectiveness of elections as an accountability mechanism. Blair (2000), Bardhan (2002) and Vijayalakshmi (2006) point to the inadequacy of elections as an accountability mechanism, and the

need for additional mechanisms to strengthen local accountability. Blair (2000, 27) finds that elections only enable the electorate to indicate their “general approval or disapproval” for the performance of an incumbent candidate. Vijayalakshmi points to the special circumstances of the Indian context, where the reservation of seats for women and marginalized caste groups (which is often by rotation) means that the possibility of re-election of incumbents is often low. Such a situation deprives people of the opportunity to sanction incumbents and accordingly reduces the effectiveness of elections as an accountability mechanism. Grindle (2007, 143) argues that heightened inter-party electoral competition in municipality elections in Mexico allowed citizens to hold their public officials accountable. However, like Vijayalakshmi, she feels that the legal prohibition on incumbent representatives contesting re-election constrained such electoral accountability to some extent, since it prevented the direct rewarding or punishment of incumbents (Grindle 2007, 175).

Apart from Grindle (2007), some other authors also link the realization of accountability through elections to electoral competition. For instance Westergaard (1986) and Echeverri-Gent (1992) find that competitive elections are functioning as an effective accountability mechanism in the Indian state of West Bengal. Echeverri-Gent illustrates his view with an example of a local council in Midnapore district of West Bengal, where local representatives reputed to be corrupt lost when they contested re-election (Echeverri-Gent 1992).

The argument that competitive elections are a source of popular pressure is logically convincing. However, there is a need to go beyond anecdotal observations (as seen in Echeverri-Gent 1992) and carry out studies that systematically scrutinize the working of competitive elections as a means of accountability. Such studies should systematically operationalize ‘competitiveness of elections’ in terms of concrete

indicators such as degree of turnover of candidates or the percentage of seats not won by the ruling group.⁵ They should also provide more systematic evidence about how elections are functioning as a source of effective popular pressure. Research from a variety of contexts would help generate more convincing evidence about why elections fail as accountability mechanisms in some contexts and succeed in others, shedding light on the role of competitiveness of elections in this respect.

Deliberative Mechanisms

The advent of deliberative mechanisms in local government experiments in several countries draws one's attention to the idea of deliberative democracy, or the democratic ideal that these experiments aspire towards, but can achieve very rarely. Appropriate procedure is a pivotal element of the idea of deliberative democracy, and Joshua Cohen has proposed the components of the "ideal deliberative procedure" (Cohen 1997, 73-75). Cohen states that there are certain components of deliberative procedure: participants decide on an agenda for deliberation, propose alternative solutions to the problems on the agenda, back the proposed solutions with reasons or rational arguments, and finally arrive at a decision by choosing one of the proposed alternative solutions. According to Cohen, these procedural components must meet certain requirements: the outcomes of deliberation are truly democratic only if they arise from free and reasoned (rational) deliberation among participants who are equal. Equality of participants must not only be procedural but also substantive. Procedural equality means that there should be equal standing or uniform rights of all persons at all stages of the deliberative process, i.e. every participant should have the right to propose issues for the agenda, propose solutions and reasons backing those solutions, and criticisms of

⁵Grindle (2007) , however, is an exception since this study does assess electoral competition in terms of the indicator of percentage of seats won by the opposition party, and commendably provides extensive and systematic data and analysis on the same.

proposed solutions. Substantive equality means that factors such as power and wealth of participants should not have any impact on people's contribution to deliberation and the outcomes of deliberation. Cohen recognizes that while ideal deliberation is based on the idea of consensual decision making, such true consensus is difficult to achieve. If true consensus cannot be achieved, then majority-based voting can be used for decision making. The results of voting would be fairer in the presence of the commitment to find a solution that is 'persuasive' to all.

It must be recognized that the features of the ideal deliberative model proposed by Cohen are noble and a fit ideal to aspire towards, but very difficult to achieve in real life. Therefore it is pertinent to turn to features of real world deliberative democracy experiments for a more realistic understanding of local deliberation and its successes. By synthesizing the features of various successful local deliberative experiments in developed and developing countries, Fung and Wright (2001) have proposed a model known as Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD). EDD is based on three principles or characteristics: the practical orientation of finding solutions to real world problems, bottom-up participation (i.e. free participation by ordinary citizens) and deliberative solution generation (i.e. the generation of solution through rational debate and discussion).

A number of studies have examined the actual functioning of public meetings or deliberative forums in local governance, whereby local residents gather, discuss and decide on governance issues affecting their lives. A part of the literature centers on the assessment of real world experiments of the aforementioned 'Empowered Deliberative Democracy' (EDD) model (Baiochhi 2001; Heller 2001). Some of the hailed EDD stories are the widespread people's participation in the *Gram Sabha* (Village Assembly) meetings during the People's Planning exercise in the Indian state of Kerala

(Bandopadhyay 1997; Heller 2001; Sharma 2007) and Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Baiochhi 2001).

In contrast to the above studies, Blair (2000) finds that for the cases selected by him, public meetings are, overall, weak as local accountability mechanisms. It is only for Honduras that Blair, in his six country study, finds public meetings to be viable accountability mechanisms. This assessment is rather problematic, because Blair also mentions that public meetings ‘have become quite successful’ in Mali, by enabling people’s participation as stakeholders in the implementation of the decentralization programme (Blair 2000, 30). This points to the need for more precise and less random assessment of accountability, according to clear parameters or indicators.

There is thus a need for more studies that systematically assess the effectiveness of deliberative mechanisms, using a variety of relevant indicators such as extent of people’s participation, inclusiveness of participation, and inclusiveness of decision making, which also partly reflect the ideal values of deliberative democracy. While Baiocchi’s (2001) study of the deliberative mechanism of Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre does not systematically explore all these indicators, it is commendable because of its detailed assessment of the inclusiveness of people’s participation and the extent of expression by the poor as vital indicators of the effectiveness of this deliberative mechanism. Devas and Grant (2003, 313) in a brief but interesting account, sum up the low overall effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism of annual budget conferences in Ugandan local councils, by stating that attendance in the conferences is lower than required by laws, meetings are not as frequent as desired, and that the language and style of these meetings are alienating many residents from attending.

An interesting, though under-developed, stream of literature on the working of deliberative mechanisms is about the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, where village

assemblies have been given all the powers of the Village Council under an experiment known as *Gram Swaraj* (which means ‘village self-rule’). James Manor points to the unique nature of the experiment, in the entire developing world, heralding it as a transition to direct democracy at the village level (Manor 2001). Few works are available on the actual operation of *Gram Swaraj*. Behar and Kumar (2002), Behar (2003) and Sisodia (2007) have noted serious problems with respect to the actual operation of the system in its initial years, such as the continued low attendance in Village Assembly meetings (Behar and Kumar 2002; Behar 2003).

The reviewed studies documenting the successes of the deliberative mechanism in the Kerala and Porto Alegre cases, and the failures in Madhya Pradesh, indicate that the mere presence of formal deliberative mechanisms does not generate effective accountability by itself, and that contextual factors are important in influencing their actual functioning. Societal factors such as social divides, weak civil society and a lack of social capital (McCarten and Vyasulu 2006; Sisodia 2007) have been cited as reasons why a bold institutional innovation like *Gram Swaraj* has supposedly failed to achieve the desired levels of accountability.⁶ The involvement of civil society in making formal mechanisms effective has been pointed out as a critical factor with respect to the successes of the People’s Planning campaign in Kerala; NGOs there played an important role in the conscientization of local residents (Heller 2001; Sharma 2007).

More refined insights on the question of why deliberative mechanisms function effectively in some contexts and not in others are required, going beyond the general insights seen in the literature. Such insights can be obtained if researchers adopt appropriate comparative methodologies. Variations in institutional design as a factor affecting the effectiveness of the mechanism can be revealed by comparing two cases

⁶ Haque (2008) mentions social divides as an obstacle to local accountability in decentralization experiments of South Asian countries.

that have similar socio-economic contexts but different institutional (legal) features in their deliberative mechanisms. Similarly, variations in socio-economic context as a factor affecting the actual functioning of the deliberative mechanisms can be uncovered by comparing two cases whose deliberative mechanisms have the same institutional features but whose socio-economic contexts differ.

Monitoring Mechanisms

The institutionalized monitoring mechanism of Social Audit is a form of community-based or citizen-based oversight. Interesting findings on the impact of popular monitoring are available in studies of Social Audit, as carried out in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. These two states are reputed for their successes in conducting Social Audit, an institutionalized mechanism of popular scrutiny and review. The most important achievement of Social Audit in these states, as highlighted by Aakella and Kidambi (2007) and Afridi (2008), is the revelation of corruption and irregularities. Afridi (2008) for instance finds that irregularities in expenditure were uncovered through Social Audit in almost all Village Councils in the Nagarkurnool area of Mehbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

The other important findings related to the actual effectiveness of Social Audit pertain to the eventual punishment of officials as a result of their misdeeds being exposed through Social Audit. Aakella and Kidambi (2007) find that Social Audit in Andhra Pradesh resulted in several lower-level field bureaucrats being dismissed from service. Afridi (2008) however finds from her Andhra Pradesh study that powerful elected representatives such as chairpersons of Village Councils remain unscathed from the Social Audit process. Furthermore, she found from her Rajasthan study that instances of corrupt functionaries being legally punished are few; the only form of

sanctioning that takes place is social sanctioning through public naming and shaming of corrupt officials.

The findings from Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan reveal the potential of Social Audit as an effective accountability mechanism. However the successes in these states are probably a result of unique contextual factors such as active civil society (Rajasthan) and political will of the state government to make Social Audit effective (Andhra Pradesh). Social Audit is now being carried out in Village Councils throughout India, as mandated by the provisions of India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Studies should be conducted in other Indian states for a more robust assessment of the effectiveness of Social Audit as an accountability mechanism, and also to reveal what particular contextual conditions are responsible for its effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

It is also worth looking at findings about the impact of Social Audit or similar forms of community-based oversight from developing countries other than India. A report prepared by the Social Development Department of the World Bank cautions that community-based or citizen-based oversight is often ineffective because citizens lack sufficient information and knowledge to carry out such oversight (World Bank 2009, 43-4). Furthermore, the report comments that the level of people's involvement in such monitoring is often of a low level. As seen in Uganda (Azfar, Kahkonen, and Meagher 2001; cited in World Bank 2009) and Tanzania (Boon 2007; cited in World Bank 2009), members from better-educated or affluent sections of society, or persons chosen by the government dominate the oversight bodies and enjoy their benefits.

Final Comments on the Local Accountability Literature

The review of the literature on three types of formal accountability mechanisms (elections, deliberative mechanisms and Social Audit) seen in this section brings to light that proper methods of comparison must be used by researchers who investigate the actual working of such mechanisms. This is critical to resolve the puzzle of why the mechanisms fail in some contexts but succeed in others. Societal level factors such as social divides and inequality (McCarten and Vyasulu 2006; Sisodia 2007) are important contextual factors that explain the actual effectiveness of formal accountability mechanisms. Informal mechanisms of accountability such as civil society (Heller 2001; Sharma 2007) and mass media such as radio and the press (Crook and Manor 1998; Devas and Grant 2003; Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher 2006) can also be seen as important factors that can conscientize people and keep them armed with information, and thus increase the effectiveness of formal accountability mechanisms.

A significant problem seen in studies dealing with local accountability such as Crook and Manor (1998) and Blair (2000) is the non-systematic and random assessment of levels of accountability. For instance, Blair (2000) in his six country study states that voluntary neighbourhood groups in Honduras have pressed for better service delivery in health and sanitation, but he does not assess civil society as a viable accountability mechanism for the Honduran context. He also assesses the deliberative mechanism of public meetings as being a viable accountability mechanism only in Honduras, but comments on its success in Mali. Blair's assessment of which accountability mechanism is viable or not viable in a particular country context is somewhat random and not backed by satisfactory evidence.

Empirical studies that assess accountability of local government in developing countries and judge it as being 'high' or 'low' frequently do so without carrying out an

a priori conceptualization and operationalization of accountability. This is a weakness seen in studies such as Crook and Manor 1998 (see page 66 of this thesis for details), Faguet (2006), Blair (2000) and Afridi (2008). Faguet (2006, 137-8) for example states that lower accountability in the less successful Bolivian municipality in his study is indicated by the presence of opportunistic alliances between parties, and low voter turnout. He assesses accountability in a rather complex way, as being related to the inefficacy of the mandate bestowed by people through the electoral process, and the consequent lower voter turnout that results from people not believing in the efficacy of their bestowed electoral mandate (given that opportunistic inter-party alliances often distort the electoral mandate). Afridi (2008, 39) argues that accountability of public officials can be improved through better stakeholder participation in the Social Audit process and sanctioning of officials identified as guilty through the Social Audit process. Such examples give as an idea that different authors interpret and understand the term 'accountability' in different ways. Given such diversity in interpreting or understanding accountability, there is a need for studies to have an a priori coherent conceptualization of accountability so that readers may be more convinced about why accountability in a particular case is judged as higher or lower. There is also a need for studies to construct detailed, specific and clear dimensions and indicators to assess the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms, so that it can be made clear as to why accountability, or the effectiveness of a particular accountability mechanism, in a particular case is judged as being high or low.

Local Government Performance: Concept, Measurement and Determinants

This section reviews the literature on local government performance. It first evaluates the definition and measurement of local government performance in different studies.

This is followed by the critique of the literature on the various determinants of local government performance and their relative salience.

Conceptualization and Measurement

The general literature on performance measurement has served as guide for the assessment of local government performance in different studies. Therefore it is pertinent to briefly review the general performance measurement literature, before turning to assessments of local government performance.

‘Performance’ as understood in the public administration literature refers to the service delivery or outputs of governmental institutions. In the performance measurement literature, efficiency and effectiveness are considered to be the economic indicators of performance (Brudney and England 1982). Efficiency indicates the extent to which a given output is produced with the least possible use of resources (Hatry 1978, 28). Effectiveness refers to the extent that goals are met (Baekkeskov 2007); it is the ratio of actual output to targeted output. Scholars have recognized that economic indicators might not be sufficient for measuring the performance of governments which after all, are institutions of public welfare and different from private firms. Morgan (1979; cited in Brudney and England 1982) therefore proposed two additional dimensions which make up the ‘political’ dimension of service delivery—he called them ‘responsiveness’ and ‘equity’. The essence of responsiveness is citizen satisfaction with service delivery. Equity concerns the distribution of services (especially with regard to demographic or spatial groups) and which groups benefit or do not benefit from such services.

Some local government researchers have highlighted the weakness of ‘responsiveness’ as a perception-based or revealed-demand based indicator. The true

measure of responsiveness, as most people would agree, should ideally be the extent to which the services delivered by local government are meeting the felt needs of the citizens. However, as revealed by Crook and Sverrisson (2001), Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006), and Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath (2006), sometimes people's expressed preferences may not match their true needs. Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) argue that the lack of scientific knowledge among local residents led to a low demand for immunization in Uganda, while Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath (2006) point to the low local demand for girls' schools in Pakistan.

The 'efficiency-effectiveness-responsiveness-equity' scheme of performance measurement has the merit of being a comprehensive operational scheme that combines objective and subjective indicators. The quality-based measures of responsiveness and equity ensure that performance measurement goes beyond technical measures such as efficiency and effectiveness. However, in view of the weaknesses of responsiveness measures, it is proper to use performance measures based on revealed preferences in combination with objective indicators in order to assess the quality of service delivery.

One measure overlooked in the prevalent performance measurement scheme is functionality (Schedler 1998 makes a passing reference to this as 'usefulness'). This measure can reconcile the dichotomy between objective and subjective indicators, between the satisfaction of true 'need' and the satisfaction of 'demand' (revealed preference) to yield a better measure of the quality of service delivery. It essentially signifies whether or not services are meeting the purposes for which they are being provided, or solving the problems they were meant to solve. For example, the functionality dimension of a school's performance would exclude indicators such as efficiency, but could include indicators of parental satisfaction along with objective

indicators relevant to the functioning of schools (such as the teacher-student ratio or availability of basic facilities such as separate classrooms for each grade).

How have researchers measured local government performance? A study by Faguet (2006) compares the local government performance of two Bolivian municipalities. Faguet however merely assesses performance in terms of 'responsiveness', relying only on perception-based assessments of survey respondents, (mostly grassroots leaders) who classify overall performance in general terms such as 'good' 'very good' 'regular' or 'bad'. Measuring local government performance using the overall assessment by 'key informants' seems to insufficiently robust. In contrast to Faguet's work, two studies of local government performance have carried out detailed and multi-dimensional operationalizations of performance (Putnam 1993; Crook and Manor 1998). Putnam's study is relevant to the developed country context while the Crook and Manor (1998) study is applicable to developing country contexts in South Asia and West Africa. The Putnam (1993) and Crook and Manor (1998) studies, while focusing on the service delivery aspect, also include input and process indicators in their operational scheme in a random manner. This affects the coherence of their operational schemes to assess performance.

In his study of regional government in Italy, Putnam primarily bases his assessment of performance on what he calls the 'policy implementation' dimension, though he also includes dimensions of 'policy formulation' and 'quality of policy pronouncements' (Putnam 1993, 65). While Putnam's twelve diverse performance indicators are found to be highly correlated to each other in statistical terms, they seem to lack conceptual coherence and consistency. For instance, he combines indicators related to specific policy areas with a general indicator named 'bureaucratic responsiveness' to assess the sub-dimension 'spending capacity' under the policy

implementation dimension; furthermore 'bureaucratic responsiveness' has questionable validity as an indicator of spending capacity (Putnam 1993, 70-73).

In their operationalization of performance, Crook and Manor (1998) develop a modified version of the efficiency-effectiveness-responsiveness-equity scheme already discussed. They use three sub-categories of performance: effectiveness, responsiveness and process. The responsiveness dimension also encompasses equity indicators. The process dimension incorporated by the authors is meant to assess levels of fairness, probity, and transparency in the operation of local governments. The process dimension pertains not only to the internal functioning of local governments but also to their dealings with the public. The operational scheme used by Crook and Manor seems to have some validity problems—the inclusion of an element such as the fairness of elections (in the process dimension) does not seem logically justifiable as an element of performance and adversely affects the coherence of their operational scheme. This is more so because their study treats accountability as a causal variable determining performance, and fair elections may be considered to be an indicator of accountability.

Determinants of Government Performance

This chapter has already briefly examined the performance measurement literature in Public Administration as a source of indicators of local government performance. Similarly, while examining the possible determinants of local government performance, it is important to touch on the general literature on the determinants of public sector organizational performance. Talbott (2010) reviews several such performance models. These models are mostly multi-dimensional in nature, in recognition of the complex and multi-faceted nature of government performance in today's age. Examples of such models are UK's Audit Commission Framework (Audit

Commission 1984), Canada's Management Accountability Framework (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat n.d.) and the Public Service Excellence Model developed by Talbott (1998, 1999). The Public Service Excellence Model developed by Talbott is commendable because unlike many other models, it distinguishes between 'enablers' of performance, and performance results. By analyzing and finding patterns in the various multi-dimensional performance models reviewed by him, Talbott (2010) proposes a model containing twelve determinants of performance, divided into three clusters: (a) values, aim (missions, goals, mandates), legitimacy, and governance arrangements (including accountability and democratic control) (b) strategy, leadership, structures and partnerships (c) resources and their management, human resources and their management, processes and their management and customer service focus (responsiveness). Shaped by the overall environment of innovation and proper risk management, these determinants have an impact on service outcomes, which in turn have an impact on society (Talbott 2010).

There is scope for further simplifying Talbott's (2010) model by grouping some of the factors together into a single factor: strategy, leadership, human resources and their management, innovation, and processes and their management may all be grouped into a single capacity variable. One must recognize that the local government performance environment of developing countries, while complex in nature, is qualitatively different from that of public organizations in general, and especially different from that of public organizations in developed countries. For instance, elements such as public-private partnerships, risk management, and sophisticated missions are not relevant to most local governance contexts in developing countries. Elements of Talbott's model such as accountability, certain components of capacity and resources are indeed relevant as possible determinants of local government

performance in developing countries. Autonomy from higher tiers of government, which is a crucial concern for local governments in developing countries, is left out of Talbott's model because it applies mainly to federal or other higher tiers of governments that are autonomous. Talbott's model, conceived from a developed country perspective and focusing on general public organizational performance, therefore is applicable, but only to a limited extent, for understanding performance determinants of local governments in developing countries.

Determinants of Local Government Performance

Different studies have identified different determinants of local government performance. Manor (1999, 55) pinpoints autonomy, accountability, finances and administrative capacity as the four crucial conditions required for successful service delivery by decentralized institutions (local governments). These four determinants pertain to the structure and actual operation of local governments as institutions. Some authors have identified factors pertaining to the economic, social or political context as significant factors affecting local government performance. Faguet (2006) identifies economic and political competition, Putnam (1993) identifies social capital and Crook and Manor (1998) pinpoints a 'supportive social and political context' with features such as egalitarian social order, lively civil society and multi-party system. These contextual factors, however, do not directly affect local government performance. They can have an impact on local government performance only by influencing or shaping the direct determinants of performance, especially one or more of the four conditions identified by Manor (1999).

Autonomy, finances, accountability and capacity may thus be identified as the four major determinants of local government performance. It can be seen in the

following paragraphs that arguments have been made about the significance of each determinant. Therefore a puzzle emerges as to which among these factors is the most significant determinant of performance. Specifically, the fundamental question that remains unanswered is: what is the salience of accountability as a determinant of local government performance, viz. a` viz. the other determinants?

Local government theorists such as John Stuart Mill have argued that local governments can better satisfy local preferences through service delivery than higher tiers of government because of superior local knowledge, interest and capacity to oversee (Mill 1911; cited in Stoker 1996). Such benefits can only be forthcoming if local governments possess autonomous powers to make decisions that satisfy the preferences of local residents instead of those of higher-level governments. Successful cases of local government performance such as the Indian states of Kerala (Vijayanand 2007) and pre-1992 Karnataka (Crook and Manor 1998) were characterized by a high degree of devolution of powers and functions to local governments. Crook and Manor (1998, 291) point to the importance of the ‘appropriate form of decentralised structure’ as one of the determinants of local government performance, implying the importance of the transfer of appropriate powers to local governments.

It is indeed a truism that without adequate finances, local governments cannot perform satisfactorily. Bird and Rodriguez (1999) argue that local governments in developing countries almost invariably suffer from hard budget constraints, and therefore increasing fiscal transfers to local bodies is critical to increase their ability to fulfil popular demands and needs. Fund constraints are often blamed by local elected representatives as the primary factor responsible for the poor performance of local government (Kumar 2006). For some scholars, what seems as important as the amount of funds transferred is financial autonomy (meaning freedom in spending funds), a

factor seen in the Karnataka experiment (Crook and Manor 1998) but absent in many cases where central or provincial governments dictate how funds are to be spent (Aziz et al. 2002; Keefer, Narayan, and Vishwanath 2006).

In spite of the apparent importance of finances as a determinant of performance, some studies give evidence to show that finances are important only to an extent in improving service delivery. Crook and Manor (1998) find that increasing fund flow to local councils in Ghana and Bangladesh did not lead to appreciable improvements in service delivery. In the success story of Karnataka, on the other hand, the total amount of funds transferred remained the same as before the decentralization experiment with a notable improvement of the performance of the councils after decentralization. Crook and Manor, however, have not precisely compared the actual financial strength of their different cases. They have only provided general measures of financial strength such as 'inadequate' or 'plentiful' for their different chosen cases relying on the perceptions of local elected representatives. It is important to compare the actual financial strength of cases whose performance is being compared, using appropriate measures such as revenue per head of population, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the importance of finance as a determinant of performance. In the absence of such evidence, inferences about the importance or insignificance of funding would remain inconclusive.

Furthermore, a comparison of the utilization of finances between different cases would clarify how important the mere availability of funds is. It is possible that two local governments may have similar financial strength but wide disparities in utilization of finances. Such disparities would lead us to look for factors other than the amount of funds (such as accountability or capacity) that would better explain performance variations.

While autonomy and funding are important, they do not guarantee that funds will be well utilized or spent in a manner that is responsive to popular demands. This brings us to the possible importance of mechanisms of accountability. Accountability mechanisms bring popular pressure to bear on local government decision makers, and may increase the likelihood that actual decisions will be in conformity with people's preferences, and that funds will be well-utilized. The studies that have elaborated the importance of accountability as the crucial determinant shaping local government performance (most notably Crook and Manor 1998) will be reviewed in the next section.

While several studies point to the positive impact of accountability on local government performance, other studies indicate that accountability is not sufficient to improve performance. The most important requirement highlighted in this respect is capacity. Capacity is a broad term encompassing technical and administrative ability to carry out decision making and implementation tasks required for service delivery. In this sense a certain level of capacity seems to be an indispensable requirement for local government service delivery.

Capacity is seen as an important determinant of performance not just in the local government literature, but also in the general literature on government or public organizational performance. Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) see capacity as the crucial determinant of government performance, the factor that is pivotal to the effective transformation of resources into policy results. Capacity for Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) means management capacity, and possesses four 'levers' or components: management systems, leadership, integration and alignment, and managing for results. Management systems, in turn, have four elements, viz. financial

management, human resources management, information technology management and capital management.⁷

The framework provided by Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) is a valuable guide for understanding the nature of capacity and its importance for government performance. It is worthwhile to examine how applicable it is to local government in general, and local governments in developing countries in particular. Poister and Streib (1997, 101), writing from a US perspective believe that management capacity, in the form of strategic management, is indeed important for local governments because of the need for a coherent sense of direction in local governments to deal with the complex environment and ever-changing community needs, political trends, inter-governmental relations, fiscal conditions and citizen expectations. Yet these authors caution that strategic management is also difficult to implement in local governments because of constraints such as limited powers (that rest on mandates bestowed by higher levels of government), sources of funding over which local governments have no control (since they come from higher tiers of government), and human resource problems such as low morale of workforce and personal antagonisms inside councils (Poister and Streib 1997, 105,123). All these problems are generally even more pronounced in local governments of developing countries. Smoke (2010) comments that inadequate technical and managerial capacity is a common problem in developing and transition countries. Narayana (2005) mentions the problem of poor capacity in Village Councils in India, especially as far as the knowledge and awareness of elected representatives is concerned. Management capacity, as it exists in local governments of developing countries, is therefore not as advanced or sophisticated as it exists in USA and other developed countries (especially in their higher tiers of government).

⁷Capital management, according to Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) means management of long-lived resources.

It therefore makes sense to adopt a notion of capacity that adopts certain elements from the Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) model, but is more in line with the reality of local government contexts in developing countries. Because of low or non-existent levels of computerization, information technology management would not be very relevant as an indicator of local government capacity in many developing countries. Nor would capital management be relevant as an indicator when local government planning, budgeting and expenditure management are often short-term (i.e. conducted on an annual basis). Management for results, too, is not very relevant as a capacity component for local governments in developing countries, because the New Public Management techniques of internally setting clear and measurable performance goals and results-oriented management are usually alien ideas for such contexts.

Financial management techniques in local governments of developing countries (including budgeting) are often rudimentary and in no way resemble the advanced and intricate financial management carried out by higher tiers of government. It must be noted that the mere availability of sufficient human and financial resources is of fundamental importance in local governments of developing countries because of their poor situation with respect to staff availability, skills and technical expertise and levels of funding relative to magnitude of needs. Nevertheless, appropriate mobilization and utilization of available financial and human resources (staff as well as elected representatives) are also significant as components of capacity for local governments in developing countries, since it is important for them to properly and strategically utilize their limited available resources, given numerous constraints such as low levels of autonomy in spending and bureaucratic stipulations imposed by higher tiers of government. Keeping in mind the Talbott (2010) and Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) studies, human resources and their management, and financial management are

therefore relevant as indicators of local government capacity in developing countries. Having recognized such significance, it makes sense to briefly explore the literature on the concept of financial management, and its state in local governments of developing countries such as India.

Effective financial management, according to Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) must possess characteristics such as efficient and accountable spending, ability to allocate resources among strategic priorities, and the dual abilities of budget allocation and budget execution. Meyers (1997) adds elements such as accurate revenue and expenditure forecasting, planning for emergencies, awareness of the link between cost and performance, and flexibility.

Budgeting is a core concern in financial management. Wildavsky (1961, 184) in fact states that budget is the ‘lifeblood of the government, the financial reflection of what the government does or intends to do.’ Budgets, therefore are not just about money, but have broader significance as statements of the vision, aims, goals and strategies of government. Wildavsky highlights the political nature of budgeting, since it involves judgments and conflicts over how to allocate limited resources among different demands and ends. Therefore budgets are not just about the technical or administrative concern of efficiency, but also about the political concern of allocation. Wildavsky argues that budgets always have to reconcile the two priorities of politics and efficiency.

Wildavsky (1961) comments that budgeting, as it prevails in US government, is incremental in nature, since it only involves minor changes from previous years, and only considers a few alternatives in decision making. He also highlights the prevalent problem of ‘slack’, i.e. less than optimum utilization of available resources because of lack of information and effort on the part of participants that hinders efficiency in the

budgetary process. Shafritz and Russel (2003) reveal that incremental budgeting is still the dominant form of budgeting in US government, in spite of the advent of newer forms such as PBBS (Planning-Programming-Budgeting System) and zero-based budgeting, and the 're-inventing government' movement of the 1990s.

Having seen insights on the general theory and state of financial management, it is pertinent to turn to insights on financial management in local government. Shafritz and Russell (2003, 461-2) reveal that traditional styles of budgeting are mostly prevalent in local governments in the US; furthermore, given the relatively less complex functions of local government, budgets are relatively simpler. These authors add that the main difference between federal government and local government budgets is that local governments, unlike federal governments, have to prepare balanced budgets.

The above mentioned characteristics of local government financial management are also applicable to developing countries. In addition, local governments in developing countries such as India (especially in rural areas) face intense challenges in budgeting and financial management because of lack of control over fund sources (which come from higher tiers), and lack of advanced knowledge and skills among elected representatives and staff. Narayana (2005) finds that elected representatives in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have no clear idea about budgeting and fund sources for their Village Councils. Vyasulu (2004) and Sodhi and Ramanujam (2006) highlight the need for training and capacity building of elected representatives in Indian *Panchayats* (rural local governments) with respect to accounting, budgeting and other basics of financial management.

While financial management is important for local governments in developing countries, it can be seen that sophisticated or highly effective financial management (of

the kind that prevails in higher levels of government, especially in developed countries) is difficult to achieve in these contexts. In fact financial management in local governments of developing countries should be judged on the basis of more rudimentary and less sophisticated criteria compared to that in higher tiers of government, especially in developed countries.

As seen in Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003), leadership is a fundamental capacity component. It is also important as a component of local government capacity in developing countries because of the potential role of leaders in managing and mobilizing the limited human and financial resources, and co-ordinating, directing and integrating the overall functioning of the local government. Lankina (2008, 36) states that leadership is often neglected as a determinant of local government performance, but leaders can make a crucial difference to performance in various ways such as “generating consensus on policy areas or pushing through a vital development agenda.” Faguet (2006) and Grindle (2007) speak of the role of entrepreneurship or innovation that leaders can play in improving local government performance. Grindle (2007) argues that the quality of governance in Mexican municipalities explored by her was significantly influenced by the entrepreneurial activities of elected and appointed municipal leaders, who were able to rapidly introduce administrative modernization. Fiszbein (1997) comments that leaders of local governments must possess both political and managerial skills, and elaborates the diverse and crucial roles that leaders can play in strengthening local government capacity: motivating the local administration and breaking its inertia, co-ordinating complex and diverse tasks, drawing on latent capacity, and managing conflict within local councils.

The term ‘capacity’ is sometimes used in a narrower sense to refer to the technical knowledge required to make and implement policies, something that trained

bureaucrats or staff members usually possess and inexperienced or untrained elected representatives and the citizenry usually lack. In this narrow sense, capacity might actually be reduced by accountability, and mere accountability would then not be sufficient for good performance. Heller (2001) and Sharma (2007) have pointed to the possible tension between two requirements of performance--accountability (in its deliberation dimension) and capacity. These authors find that a significant decision making role exercised by deliberative bodies made up of ordinary citizens (who lack the necessary technical skills) can lead to a reduction of technical capacity in the decision making process. In order to overcome the possible negative impact on performance created by high popular control, deliberative experiments (such as People's Planning in Kerala and Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil) have had to use intermediate tiers of skilled or trained actors. The function of such intermediate tiers of actors is to carry out complex and technical tasks of decision making, leaving mere demand identification to the popular deliberative assemblies (Bandopadhyay 1997; Baiocchi 2001; Heller 2001; Sharma 2007). Fiszbein (1997), in his exploration of capacity building in Columbian municipalities, however argues that high accountability, through competitive elections that result in competent local government representatives being chosen, and inflow of people's inputs into the decision making process, can actually increase the capacity of local government. Fiszbein's understanding of capacity however fits into the wider notion of capacity that goes beyond technical capacity.

Crook and Manor (1998), who identified accountability as the crucial determinant of local government performance, considered the impact of finances as a performance determinant but did not consider the role of capacity. Crook and Manor's successful case was one that had 'plentiful' and 'stable' finances (1998, 290) and also

high accountability. Neither the Crook and Manor study, nor any other study however, deals with a case that has high accountability but low finances and capacity. What would the performance of such a case be like? Would its performance be better than that of a case having lower accountability but higher finances and capacity? This is indeed a question worth exploring.

The conflicting evidence on the relative importance of the difference performance determinants, and the unanswered question about the salience of accountability compared to the other factors, create the need for a study that would solve the puzzle of the relative salience of different performance determinants. Such a study would have to use the appropriate comparative methodology and operational measures of variables to yield robust and convincing answers.

The Relationship between Accountability and Performance

This section reviews the literature dealing with the accountability-performance relationship, examining firstly the theoretical literature and then the empirical studies on the topic. It must be recognized that the relationship between these two variables is not necessarily one-way. Local government service delivery or performance may also have an impact on accountability. Chaudhuri (2006) states that widespread performance failures (such as lack of responsiveness to people's needs, corruption and leakages) in local service delivery in India were the reason behind India's democratic decentralization reforms that took important steps to strengthen local accountability by bolstering local accountability mechanisms. Local residents in Tanzania are legally empowered to prepare and submit mass petitions against councillors who have failed in their duties. This formal mechanism has often been effectively used by Tanzanian NGOs but rarely by common people (World Bank 2009, 27). The rural local

government law in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh provides village assemblies the right to recall the Village Council's elected representatives (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2002, 2009), thus legally empowering the former to bring about the dismissal of the latter on grounds of arbitrary behaviour and violation of the decisions of the Village Assembly (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2005). Performance failures may conceivably push local residents to cast off their apathy and actually participate in mechanisms to hold their local governments accountable. One such example is the use of the informal accountability mechanism known as *hartal* (strike) by local residents in Bangladesh. In response to performance failures, local residents in Bangladeshi cities have been seen to participate in mass mobilization and paralyze daily life, albeit on instigation by politically-connected muscle men. There are many instances of elected local governments in Bangladesh being dismissed as a result of such *hartals* (World Bank 2009, 27).

Such illustrations of the two-way relationship between accountability and performance make us realize the complexity of the relationship between them. Since the focus of this study is the impact of accountability on performance, the remaining treatment in this section is devoted to the review of studies dealing with the impact of accountability on performance.

Theoretical Explanations

Theories about the impact of accountability on performance reveal causal processes that operate between these two variables. Some of these perspectives apply not just to local government but to the functioning of governments in general. One such theoretical perspective is the 'Good Governance' perspective developed by the World Bank. In the World Bank's view, accountability is important to ensure the congruence between

public policy and actual implementation and the efficient allocation and use of public resources (World Bank 1992).

March and Olsen (1995) have examined the impact of accountability on an important aspect of performance, which is decision making. These authors found that accountability can have positive and negative effects. On the positive side, it makes social control more effective and political actors more responsive to social pressures and to standards of appropriate behaviour. On the flip side, accountability can lead to delay in decision making through procrastination and excessive consideration of possibilities, and reduce risk taking. March and Olsen's view is relevant to the micro context of the individual decision maker. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that macro-level governance is after all the aggregation of individual decision makers at the policy making, implementation and service delivery stages, and their combined propensities are very likely to have some impact on the overall functioning of institutions. March and Olsen's view indicates that one should be careful about assuming that increased accountability will automatically result in good performance.

Keefer and Khemani (2005) provide theoretical insights about the impact of a specific accountability mechanism (elections) on service delivery by governments in general. They argue that certain factors hinder the positive impact of electoral competition on public goods delivery. Firstly, voters lack information about the specific role of different incumbents in the service delivery process, which lowers the incentive of incumbents to respond to the performance expectations of the citizens. Besides, voter choice in fragmented societies is determined not by performance considerations but by identity- based factors such as the ethnic identity of the candidate. These are important arguments which should temper one's acceptance of the widely assumed view of competitive elections (whether in local government or at any other level) leading to

better performance. Hickok (1995) also argues that competitive elections are necessary, though not sufficient to bring about performance-based sanctioning of incumbent candidates. The reasons for this are voting on the basis of non-performance considerations such as party affiliation of candidates, and the complicated nature of the policy process that makes it difficult for voters to follow who is responsible for a particular policy decision or action.

Some theoretical perspectives are specifically relevant to the examination of accountability and performance at the level of local government; they elaborate whether local accountability can help improve local service delivery or local government performance (Walsh 1996; Bardhan 2002; Hiskey 2010).⁸ Hiskey (2010), adopting a principal-agent view of local accountability, argues that local accountability might have both a positive or negative impact on local government performance. The closeness of local governments to the people, he argues, might bring about better oversight and sanctioning of elected representatives (agents) by the people (principals), thus bringing about a better conformity of the actions of the former with the preferences of the latter (through improved monitoring capability and interest compatibility⁹). On the negative side, intense control by the local populace might constrain the autonomy or independence of elected representatives and force them to continually pander to the wishes of the local residents, thus preventing them from taking up courses of action that fail to win popular favour but are actually good for the long term well being of local residents and performance prospects of local government. Hiskey concludes by encouraging reformers and architects of decentralization experiments to have a clear

⁸Walsh examines the role of 'local democracy' in promoting efficiency of service delivery; however his understanding of local democracy is almost equivalent to local popular accountability.

⁹Interest compatibility between principals and agents can be brought about through the means of agent selection i.e. choosing or sanctioning of elected representatives by local residents. Such selection would enable them to choose new representatives, or retain incumbent representatives, whose preferences are compatible with their own preferences (Hiskey 2010)

conception of whether enhanced accountability and participation, or efficient service delivery, is their preferred goal, since one possibly (though not always) can come at the expense of the other.

Walsh's (1996) view is valuable since it examines in a nuanced way (albeit from an economics perspective), the differential impact of local accountability on various aspects of performance, and also the varying impacts of different accountability mechanisms. For instance, he argues that for the realization of x-efficiency in service delivery (meaning efficiency in the economic sense of minimization of wastage), what is important is not so much elections but the concrete answerability of individuals who indulge in wastage. What will work to bring about x-efficiency is performance standards, and bodies for monitoring performance against such standards such as audit agencies, rather than accountability to the electorate.

Walsh argues that local popular accountability mechanisms have a much greater impact on the fit between services and local preferences (allocative efficiency or responsiveness) than on efficiency in its economic sense. This is because expression of people's preferences is essential for service delivery to meet such preferences, and accountability mechanisms of local government can help in such expression. Walsh however feels that elections are not sufficient for this, and that deliberative mechanisms such as citizen panels are required, in addition to elections, to reveal preferences.

Walsh's theoretical work on the accountability-performance relationship in local government is useful as a guide for empirical research. His theoretical arguments about the impact of specific accountability mechanisms (such as elections and deliberative mechanisms) on specific dimensions of performances (such as efficiency and the congruence of services with local preferences) provide clear hypotheses that can guide any empirical examination of the relationship between accountability and

performance. The theoretical views proposed by Walsh, combined with those of Keefer and Khemani (2005) and Hickok (1995), lead one to question whether competitive elections are indeed a magic bullet to cure all the performance problems faced by local governments.

Empirical Findings

The Crook and Manor (1998) study has explicitly identified accountability as the most important determinant of local government performance. It comments on the overall relationship between accountability and performance. While other empirical studies do not argue about the accountability-performance connection in such explicit terms, the positive relationship between the two variables seems implied in most of their findings and arguments. Such studies examine the impact of particular accountability mechanisms on local government performance or particular aspects of performance. Some such studies argue about the positive impact of competitive elections on responsiveness of service delivery (Echeverri-Gent 1992; Sengupta and Gazdar 1997; Faguet 2006). Others attribute improvement of school teacher performance to the impact of community monitoring (Rana, Rafique, and Sengupta 2002; McCarten and Vyasulu 2004). Local deliberation, according to the EDD studies, leads to more equitable and efficient service delivery (Baiocchi 2001; Fung and Wright 2001; Heller 2001). Aziz et al. 2002 believe that Social Audit can reduce corruption. The first part of this review of empirical accountability-performance studies evaluates the study that comments explicitly on the overall relationship, while the latter part critiques the studies that examine the impact of particular accountability mechanisms (elections, deliberative mechanisms and Social Audit) on performance.

The Overall Relationship between Accountability and Performance

Crook and Manor's (1998) study is a makes a clear argument about the relationship between local government accountability and performance. Richard Crook and James Manor study four cases-the Indian state of Karnataka, Bangladesh, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. They find only Karnataka to possess an unambiguous record of good performance, and conclude that an optimum combination of factors is needed to produce such performance (defined in terms of 'responsiveness' and not mere quantity of outputs), including an 'appropriate form of decentralized structure', a 'supportive social and political context', adequate resources and most crucially effective systems of popular and institutional accountability (Crook and Manor 1998, 291).¹⁰ None of the other cases (all categorized as unsuccessful in terms of responsiveness of service delivery) possess significant degrees of both popular and institutional accountability. They identify accountability as the crucial link between increased participation and improved performance since it enables influence from the grassroots to be transmitted to the governmental institutions which manage resources and implement policy.

Crook and Manor's study is of immense usefulness and value as a guide to other research and scholarship in the field of local government studies. This frequently cited work has the merit of being a comprehensive analysis and investigation into the factors associated generally with successful local government performance. What makes it valuable is their assessment of performance in terms of a set of concrete indicators and not in vague, general terms, a characteristic seen in very few studies. Their operationalization of performance, though commendable in this respect, also has certain weaknesses (see page 47 of this thesis for details). They claim to have discovered only an association between certain factors and local government performance, of which

¹⁰Crook and Manor (1998) use the term 'popular accountability' for direct accountability of elected representatives to people, and 'institutional accountability' for accountability of bureaucrats to elected representatives.

popular and institutional mechanisms of accountability are the most important. The authors expressly state the limitations of their methodology that relies on a comparison of four totally disparate cases and especially on the identification of a deviant case (in their study, the Indian state of Karnataka that is the only case to show successful local government performance).

Because of the limitations of its methodology, the Crook and Manor study yields a tentative hypothesis about the relationship between accountability and performance that should be subjected to further empirical scrutiny. It is important to investigate the accountability-performance relationship by comparing cases that are comparable in some way, rather than totally disparate. This can possibly lend greater rigour to any findings about the relationship. Besides, accountability is not explored as a variable in its own right in the Crook and Manor study. It is seen merely as a link between increased participation and improved performance. Therefore the authors do not identify the detailed dimensions of accountability or attempt to systematically operationalize the concept. It is important to note that they claim a distinction between participation with accountability: they provide the examples of Ghana and Bangladesh that are found to possess high levels of participation with low levels of accountability. They find accountability in the successful case (Karnataka) to result from forces such as the competitiveness of the party system, a free and active media, and the tradition of a civil service that is used to working under and obeying elected representatives.

There is a major weakness in Crook and Manor's argument about the relationship between accountability and performance: the authors state that accountability enables popular demands to bear on and be transmitted through the institutions of policy making and implementation. Yet it is questionable whether mere accountability (even in both its direct and indirect forms), enables this. The authors

have not considered the role of procedural stipulations formulated by higher levels of government and mandatorily enforced by the bureaucracy, and the role of the attitudes of the decision making and implementing actors (viz. bureaucrats and elected representatives) in possibly hindering the actual translation of expressed popular demands into service delivery congruent with such demands. The authors have not defined accountability; this makes it all the more difficult to understand how accountability can achieve the transmission of popular pressures throughout the internal systems of local government.

Crook and Manor also include indicators pertaining to freeness and fairness of elections inside their operational scheme to assess performance, thus failing to keep distinct the variables accountability and performance. Putting it simply, the authors fail to clearly distinguish between accountability, the impact of the intervening factors affecting the accountability-performance relationship (such as preferences of bureaucrats), and performance. Accountability should be assessed in terms of detailed dimensions and indicators (something that Crook and Manor did not do) so that the assessment of accountability is more robust, less random, and kept distinct from other variables in the study.

While the Crook and Manor (1998) study contains a qualitative assessment of the local government accountability-performance relationship, the study by Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) provides a quantitative analysis of this relationship. These authors use the term 'political disciplines' instead of accountability (though its meaning is equivalent to that of accountability as popular pressure). In their study of decentralized institutions of Uganda, they run a regression of a specific measure of the dependent variable service delivery (quality of education) on two different dimensions of the independent variable 'political disciplines' (media use and voting).

The quality of education variable in the Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) study is measured in terms of test scores of primary school students and a perception-based assessment of quality of education (based on household survey responses). The first dimension of political disciplines--media use--is conceptually based on the idea of accountability as transparency, and is measured in terms of an index that combines specific measures of whether the media (and not local politicians) is the primary source of information for households, and frequency of newspaper and radio use by households. The second dimension of political disciplines—voting and political action—is conceptually based on the idea of accountability as voice, and is measured in terms of an index that combines specific measures of whether households voted, whether households voted for ‘good’ reasons (such as candidate’s agenda and prior experience of candidate, but not religion, race, language), and whether the households participated in political action.

Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) run a regression of the service delivery variable – quality of education – on the two dimensions of ‘political disciplines’ or accountability, for 75 cases (subcounties). The results are that the ‘media use’ dimension of accountability has a statistically significant positive impact on the quality of education, whereas the effect of ‘voting and political action’ is negative and not statistically significant. The authors of this study thus find that the use of media as a source of information on local politics is related to better service delivery in the area of education, and that there is no noticeable impact of voting on education quality. Higher use of independent media as a source of information, the authors infer, enables better tracking of corruption, and can act as factor constraining corruption, leading to better performance.

The Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) study is praiseworthy for its use of a large sample of 75 local councils (sub-counties) and its nuanced assessment of the impact of accountability or ‘political disciplines’ on service delivery. This study helps us appreciate the complexity of the accountability-performance relationship, by showing that different dimensions of accountability can have different impacts on performance. However, the study does possess certain limitations. The hypothetical causal linkage or causal story between the dimension ‘voting and political action’ and the dependent variable ‘quality of education’ (that rests on indicators such as test scores and subjective quality of education) is not clear. Test scores are more suited as an indicator of school performance, rather than local government performance, since it depends on factors such as teacher quality, sincerity, pedagogy and regularity rather than the performance of local councils or their representatives. Apart from the role of district level governments in recruiting teachers and paying them, the role of Ugandan local governments with respect to education provision is not clear. It is not clear, therefore, how popular voting in subcounty or district elections could conceivably affect such educational outcomes. It must be acknowledged, however, that the dimension of media use can have a conceivable causal impact on quality of education (though not necessarily on test scores), since it enables availability of information about financial resources and consequent tracking of educational expenditures, thus constraining corruption. Such constraining of corruption can enable a more productive utilization of financial resources for improving education.

The operationalization of political disciplines in Azfar, Livingston, and Meagher (2006) is conceptually coherent (since it equates overall effectiveness of political disciplines to availability of information and its consequent use to sanction or pressurize public officials). However, the operationalization of this variable is, by no

means, comprehensive or complete. The authors could have included certain crucial indicators pertaining to the functioning of deliberative mechanisms to bolster their operationalization of the 'voice' dimension of accountability, considering that the deliberative mechanism of annual budget conferences are available at all levels of local councils in Uganda, in which local residents can participate and voice their preferences (Devas and Grant 2003).

Impact of Elections on Performance

Some authors have pointed out linkages between elections and specific dimensions of performance, such as responsiveness of service delivery to popular needs and preferences. Electoral competition has been suggested by some authors as a necessary condition for elections to have a positive impact on local government performance. Various theoretical views (Walsh 1996; Keefer and Khemani 2005) and empirical findings (Echeverri-Gent 1992; Sengupta and Gazdar 1997; Crook and Manor 1998; Faguet 2006; Majumdar 2009) point to the importance or limitations of competitive elections in improving local government performance. The literature mentions three specific causal mechanisms or pathways through which competitive elections might have a positive impact on performance. The first pathway is through the defeat of incumbents that creates pressure for improving performance. The second pathway is through oversight of the ruling group by the numerically strong opposition group in local councils. The third and final pathway is through the selection of competent election candidates as chairpersons/representatives of councils and rejection of incompetent ones.

The first causal process that is implicit in various author's arguments is that competitive elections are leading to the turnover of incumbent representatives or ruling

groups and thus creating pressure for improved performance. Echeverri-Gent (1992) points out that there is a positive association between electoral competitiveness and responsiveness of local governments, as seen in the Indian state of West Bengal. He gives a specific example of how voters turned out representatives reputed to be corrupt in a particular local government in Midnapore district, but does not show if such turnover had a positive impact on responsiveness for that particular local government.

Majumdar (2009) finds that both her chosen Village Councils in West Bengal have experienced regular alteration of ruling party (indicating operation of anti-incumbency effect), but this has not led to any significant improvement of the area in terms of infrastructure or amenities. The author's explanation is that since important policy decisions are centralized, electoral competition alone cannot be a sufficient force for improved service delivery. Majumdar's argument about why electoral competition is not having an impact on performance is not convincing because Village Councils in West Bengal have been given a degree of autonomy with respect to certain functional areas such as infrastructure provision (while they continue to lack autonomy with respect to other functional areas such as health care). Furthermore, local governments have been given freedom in spending on projects up to a reasonable limit and are now less dependent on higher levels of government. Therefore there must be some other explanation about why electoral competition is not having a positive impact on performance. A possible reason why frequent electoral turnover in Majumdar's cases is not inducing performance improvements might be that such turnover is not based on performance considerations. In other words, local residents are possibly not choosing or rejecting their individual representatives on the basis of performance considerations.

Majumdar's study uses evidence of frequent turnover of ruling party and anecdotal accounts of slim victory margins of individual candidates as evidence of a

high degree of electoral competition. Her study does not provide evidence of the degree of turnover or defeat of individual incumbent representatives seeking re-election. The most effective pressure on incumbents, that could push them towards better performance, is likely to come from the increased likelihood of their personal defeat in the upcoming elections, rather than that of the ruling party. The evidence on victory margins would have been more convincing, had it come from records of election results rather than from interview responses of a few local representatives.

Sengupta and Ghosh (2006) in their empirical study of ten Village Councils in West Bengal, interestingly find that voters in Village Council elections are guided not by the past performance of their council or the scale of development in their locality, but by party loyalty while exercising their choice. Therefore it is not ensured that voters would use electoral sanctions to oust a non-performing candidate or party. One may infer from the authors' observation that in such an event, competitive elections would not generate any pressure for improved performance. The relationship between electoral competition (in the form of frequent turnover of incumbents) and performance appears to be moderated by a particular condition, and this condition is voting on the basis of performance considerations.

While the reviewed literature in this area furnishes useful insights that can serve as hypotheses for an empirical study of accountability and performance, it suffers from one weakness. It does not distinguish between how competitive elections, through turnover of incumbents, promote accountability and how they promote responsiveness or better performance. Cementing some gaps in the above arguments, it makes better sense to hypothesize that frequent turnover makes accountability realizable since it causes the actual or likely defeat (sanctioning) of most incumbents. Frequent turnover arising from competitive elections make better performance realizable when the

pressure created by such turnover (which is based on performance considerations) actually pushes local government representatives or ruling groups to perform well.

Oversight of the ruling group by a numerically strong opposition group in local councils (that is generated through competitive elections) leads to a reduction in wrongdoings and corruption and increase in responsiveness on the part of the ruling group, according to some authors (Crook and Manor 1998; Blair 2000; Matthew 2007a). Some studies have identified interesting mediating conditions in this respect. One such condition is party-based electoral competition. Crook and Manor (1998, 295-6) believe that non-party elections can lead to 'supine' local councils with no interest in monitoring or challenging behaviour of the council chairperson. Blair (2000) inferred from the case of Honduras and Crook and Manor (1998) from the case of Karnataka that party-based electoral competition generated lively and vigilant opposition groups in the successful local governments. Such findings imply that competitive elections must be party-based to generate a strong and vigilant opposition.

Faguet (2006) finds that while competitive elections generate a numerically significant opposition bloc (as it did in both his chosen Bolivian municipalities), the actual oversight of the ruling bloc by the opposition bloc happens only in the absence of underhand and opportunistic dealings between the two blocs. Therefore meaningful political competition needs to supplement electoral competition for electoral competition to have an impact on performance. This was seen in his successful case of Baures municipality but missing in the unsuccessful case of Guayaramerin. Political competition that is lively, but harmonious at the same time, and without gross opportunism is important, according to some authors for competitive elections to have an impact on performance (Crook and Manor 1998; Faguet 2006).

The third causal process between competitive elections and performance pointed out in the literature is that competitive elections are leading to election of good quality leaders, which in turn results in good local government performance. This is observed by Fiszbein (1997) for Columbia, where competitive elections leading to competent, responsible persons being chosen as mayors and councillors, are improving the policy performance of municipalities. Faguet (2006) argues that electoral competition fosters 'policy entrepreneurship' by bringing about election of mayors and councillors who are capable of policy innovation and thus, better equipped to serve the well-being of their constituents. This particular causal process indicates that competitive elections can have an impact on performance not just through turnover between two or more elections but also through selection of capable candidates in a single election.

The above hypotheses derived from the literature, related to the impact of competitive elections on local government performance, should be subjected to empirical examination by comparing and contrasting the performance of two or more local governments which differ in degrees of electoral competition. The need to subject these hypotheses to empirical examination arises especially because of theoretical perspectives (Hickok 1995; Keefer and Khemani 2005) and certain empirical findings (Grindle 2007; Moreno-Jaimes 2007) challenging the idea that competitive elections necessarily improve local government performance. Moreno-Jaimes (2007) in his quantitative study of Mexican municipalities, finds that electoral competition in these municipalities has had no impact on their performance (in terms of coverage of essential civic services). Merilee Grindle argues that the impact of increased electoral competition on the performance of Mexican municipalities was constrained because such electoral competition generated a more contentious environment inside councils,

in terms of division of views between councillors, party-based conflicts over the distribution of resources, and the consequent disruptions in decision making. Such contention created difficulties in governing the municipalities; as a result, the heightened pressure created by intense electoral competition did not have a positive impact on performance (Grindle 2007, 78). On reading Grindle's work, one can question whether the contentious environment created by inter-party electoral competition was the only reason for popular pressure created by elections not having an impact on performance. Grindle (2007, 38) notes that the law prevented elected officials of municipalities from contesting re-election for their incumbent position at the end of the three-year term. The absence of pressure on individual elected representatives (because of the lack of the opportunity to contest re-election for the same position) may possibly have been a factor for the lack of such impact (since elected representatives might have felt a reduced incentive to put in their best efforts into the execution of their duties). This particular aspect is worthy of further exploration and research.¹¹

Furthermore, the literature suggests certain possible pathways between electoral competition and improved GP performance, but these pathways might not be actually fulfilled in all kinds of contexts. This also makes us question if electoral competition will always be successful in improving performance. The extensive literature elaborating the impact of competitive elections on performance provides us with a set of hypotheses about such impact, and reveals the possible causal processes that operate between competitive elections and performance. It needs to be seen, through empirical studies employing the appropriate methodology, whether these hypotheses or possible causal processes are fulfilled in different cases and contexts. As an improvement to the available studies, comprehensive operationalization and sound measurement of the

¹¹Grindle (2007) notes the prohibition on re-election as a factor constraining accountability, but does not explore it as a factor constraining performance.

variables concerned (such as ‘responsiveness’ or ‘performance’ and ‘electoral competition’) in terms of precise indicators, should be carried out for a better assessment of the impact of electoral competition on performance.

Impact of Deliberative Mechanisms on Performance

The EDD framework highlights the impact of deliberative mechanisms on local government performance (Fung and Wright 2001). EDD is a framework based on the common features of real world deliberative experiments that involve people in decision making and implementation. The crux of the EDD framework is the realization of benefits in service delivery and solving of practical problems through the use of local deliberation. The benefits of EDD lie not just in realizing democratic ideals of meaningful people’s participation, but also in generating service delivery gains. The deliberative mechanisms embodied in the EDD experiments, Fung and Wright (2001) believe, might even be superior to elections in enhancing the responsiveness, equity and effectiveness of service delivery. The utility of the EDD framework lies in specifying the possible causal processes that operate between local deliberation and superior service delivery.

Deliberative mechanisms in EDD experiments can be expected to generate service delivery gains because they involve and utilize the genius of people close to points of action who possess intimate knowledge about relevant situations. They also put in place a decision making process whereby superior solutions may be generated because all participants have the opportunity to offer useful inputs. Local deliberation can also bring about equity in service delivery by including people from marginalized sections in the deliberation process and revealing their preferences (Fung and Wright 2001, 25-7).

Real world cases that have experimented with EDD, such as the Participatory Budgeting process in municipal government in Porto Alegre, Brazil and People's Planning in Kerala, India, have experienced service delivery gains as a result of the successful operation of their deliberative mechanisms. It is noteworthy, however, that adaptations and design innovations have had to be made in these cases to overcome the challenges arising from the implementation of the utopian provisions of the EDD framework. In Kerala, a shift in allocation priorities was seen as a result of People's Planning, with increases of financial outlay to meet people's most pressing needs such as housing, sanitation and drinking water (Heller 2001). In Porto Alegre, the evidence is stronger, with outcomes from Participatory Budgeting seen in the form of greatly improved access to amenities and increased standards of living (Baiocchi 2001).¹² Heller (2001, 140-1) lauds the Porto Alegre experiment for the replacement of patronage-defined allocations by community-defined priorities, reconciling of local needs with city-wide needs, and significantly widened range of services provided by the municipality.

Some cases in the developing world have had less spectacular and more modest gains compared to the hailed EDD cases such as Kerala and Porto Alegre. Such experiments are also commendable as improvements over earlier periods where people were deprived of any voice in the service delivery process. An example is Kenya where the deliberative process of citizen participation in the preparation of the Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan has "dramatically increased the extent of public consultation at the local level" and resulted in projects that apparently better reflect citizens' interests, compared to earlier projects that were prioritized by the local authorities (Devas and Grant 2003, 314).

¹²98% people had access to drinking water, 98% sewage coverage was achieved, and there were 89 functioning municipal schools, compared to the 29 that existed before Participatory Budgeting was started (Baiocchi 2001).

The EDD propositions, however, need to be empirically verified in a wider range of cases (and not just in urban areas such as Porto Alegre or rural areas with high literacy such as those in Kerala) in order to see that deliberative experiments are indeed having a positive impact on local government performance. Deliberative experiments in a variety of contexts deserve to be investigated for their functioning in terms of the extent of popular participation generated, for their impact on service delivery, and for a discovery of the institutional features or contextual conditions of these experiments that are hindering or promoting service delivery gains.

Some other considerations strengthen the case for EDD hypotheses to be tested in a variety of empirical contexts. Capacity problems have been observed by some authors with respect to the real world operation of deliberative experiments (Heller 2001; Sharma 2007). Baiocchi (2001, 48) also acknowledges that a combination of direct or deliberative and representative democracy is required for the 'complex management' of an entire municipality; it is implicit in his argument that direct democracy, by itself, might create capacity problems and be constrained in its ability to improve service delivery. Intermediate tiers of delegates or skilled persons have been used in the higher tiers of decision making in the Participatory Budgeting process in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi 2001) and People's Planning in Kerala (Bandopadhyay 1997), with the lower level direct democracy forums carrying out mere demand identification. A minimum amount of finances and local government capacity must be available for the service delivery gains foreseen by EDD proponents to be actually forthcoming.

Intervening factors, such as the rules imposed by bureaucrats and the resistance of bureaucrats and elected representatives within the decision making and implementing structures of local government, might constrain the translation of popular inputs from deliberative forums into actual benefits for the people. Ghatak and Ghatak

(2002) in their evaluation of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad* meetings in rural local government in West Bengal, comment that the connection between popular deliberation in such meetings and actual decision making of local government is indirect and tenuous. They also argue that a significant amount of local government decision making is dictated by the preferences of higher-level bureaucrats rather than the popular preferences expressed in the deliberative bodies.¹³ Such factors might constrain the positive impact of deliberative mechanisms on performance in actual reality, as result of which the EDD propositions might not be empirically borne out in all kinds of contexts.

Even in the EDD success story of Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, the actual prioritization of projects is done by the intermediate tiers of regional delegates and the Municipal Council of the Budget, and not by the people in direct democracy forums (Baiocchi 2001, 46-7). This raises issues and questions about the considerations that govern the prioritization and final selection of projects, and subject people's expressed preferences to selectivity and filtering. There are complexities in the decision making process in deliberative experiments that remain to be explored carefully before coming to any conclusive judgment about the impact of deliberative or direct democracy forums on service delivery.

Impact of Monitoring Mechanisms on Performance

The empirical evidence about the impact of popular monitoring on local government performance is conflicting. The evidence mostly pertains to the success or failure of such monitoring in reducing corruption that causes wastage of resources.

¹³With reference to the current situation in West Bengal, this argument is more relevant as far as decision making on selection of welfare programme beneficiaries by Village Councils is concerned, and less relevant to decisions regarding the selection of infrastructural works.

Aziz et.al (2002) in their study of the three South Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh argue that ineffective popular monitoring is responsible for corruption and the poor quality of public works executed by Village Councils. One important reason for such poor popular monitoring, the authors feel, is the ineffectiveness of the Village Assembly and the absence of Social Audit by people and community organizations. The media and the opposition parties in the rural areas do highlight instances of corruption but these mechanisms, according to the authors, remain largely ineffective in checking corruption.¹⁴ The authors feel that only public vigilance through Social Audit can check large-scale corruption and ensure that works are of good quality and executed on time. (Aziz et al. 2002, 307). The inferences of the authors are not based on any concrete evidence of the effectiveness of Social Audit in actually checking corruption or improving performance; therefore their speculations remain at an abstract level without being borne out by concrete empirical evidence.

The available empirical studies on Social Audit in India mostly focus on Social Audit as a mechanism of accountability (examining its role in exposing irregularities and getting corrupt public functionaries punished) instead of focusing on whether Social Audit is actually leading to performance gains. As a result there is no conclusive evidence about the positive effect of Social Audit on local government performance, through causal processes such as prevention of wastages through the reduction of corruption. One study however informs that Social Audit in the states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh has led to the recovery of a small proportion of funds pilfered by public officials through the identification of such officials, and consequent application of social sanctions to them (Afridi 2008). A World Bank report comments that the actual impact of citizen-based monitoring mechanisms is negligible and insignificant,

¹⁴This is contrary to Crook and Manor's (1998) views with respect to Karnataka in the 1987-1991 local government experiment.

as seen, for example in Ethiopia. This report however acknowledges that more empirical research is required to ascertain the actual impact of such monitoring (World Bank 2009, 44).

Another stream of literature about the impact of community monitoring pertains not to local government per se, but to the functioning of alternative primary schools and their teachers in some Indian states. Monitoring by the local community has been seen as a crucial reason for the success of alternative primary schools in Madhya Pradesh known as EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) schools (McCarten and Vyasulu 2004, 2006) and those in West Bengal, called *Shishu Shiksha Kendras* or SSKs (Rana, Rafique, and Sengupta 2002). The teachers are recruited locally, and observers feel that because of their closeness to the village community, they can be effectively monitored by the parents and the community (McCarten and Vyasulu 2004, 2006). One study also noted a better performance of SSKs compared to mainstream primary schools in its sample areas in terms of lower teacher absenteeism, higher student attendance, and better teacher-student relationship (Rana, Rafique, and Sengupta 2002; cited in Jha 2003). The teachers of SSKs are found to perform better than mainstream primary school teachers despite poorer pay and working conditions. Furthermore parental monitoring is supposed to be playing a more crucial role in improving the performance of these schools than the ineffective bureaucratic school inspection system (Rana et al. 2003).

However the present reality in Indian states such as Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal is that mainstream primary schools and their teachers are also being subjected to the same monitoring mechanisms (such as parent-teacher meetings and local Management Committees made up of parents) that alternative primary school teachers are subjected to. Local recruitment of mainstream primary school teachers, which

enables the local community to keep a better watch on them, is now the norm in the villages of Madhya Pradesh. Therefore, mere community or parental monitoring does not explain why alternative primary school teachers perform better than mainstream primary school teachers. There must be some other decisive factor, in addition to community monitoring, that explains the differences between the performance of mainstream and alternative primary school teachers. Rana et.al (2003) identify the dependence of the tenure of alternative primary school teachers in West Bengal on the continuing approval of the school Management Committees (because of temporary or contract-based appointment) as the cause behind their superior performance. In other words, the possibility of performance-based sanctioning (in the form of termination of tenure linked to performance failure) is the critical condition that explains the better performance of alternative primary school teachers. This explains more cogently the impact of accountability on the better performance of alternative primary school teachers, rather than mere parental or community monitoring.

Conclusion

Very few theoretical and empirical studies explicitly comment on the relationship between accountability and performance. Many studies do not explicitly refer to the accountability-performance relationship, but implicitly point to it. Such studies examine the relationship between specific dimensions of accountability and performance. Some studies in the available literature lead us to recognize that the relationship between accountability and performance is complex, and subject to the operation of several mediating conditions and possible tensions.

While the available studies yield valuable insights on the relationship between accountability and performance in local government, they also contain significant

weaknesses. Firstly, the operationalization of accountability and performance in the available studies lacks comprehensiveness and precision. This study has developed multi-dimensional operational schemes, with careful indicator selection, to carry out the assessment of accountability and performance. The endeavour is to minimize randomness in their assessment.

Secondly, methodological weaknesses such as directly comparing completely different cases and not adequately exploring complex intermediate processes and causal mechanisms have been seen in available studies on the accountability-performance relationship. To avoid such weaknesses, this study carries out partially controlled case comparison, and also explores the complex processes and causal mechanisms operating between accountability and its constituent dimensions, and performance.

The literature is a valuable source of hypotheses for this study. However, the hypotheses need to be subjected to further empirical scrutiny. This thesis integrates, into an examination of the hypothesized overall relationship between accountability and performance, the examination of the specific hypotheses about the impact of different accountability mechanisms on different performance aspects. It is an attempt to overcome some of the weaknesses of earlier studies, and to add to the interesting observations made in the literature by subjecting the accountability-performance relationship to closer, more nuanced examination.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is an elaboration of the research design and methodology used in this study, the fundamentals of which were mentioned in Chapter 1. The first section of this chapter describes the case selection principles and the nature of cases selected. The second section elaborates the levels of analysis that correspond to the study's three major methodological strategies. The third section gives an account of the operationalization of the variables accountability and performance. The final section is about the data gathering and data analysis methods used in the study, the latter revealing the analytical processes used at different levels of inference.

Case Selection

Since India is a vast country with 28 states, it is very difficult to study the whole of the country. Therefore the search for cases has been narrowed down to two Indian states. The two Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have been selected for this study. Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal lie in a handful of Indian states that have carried out any notable or meaningful devolution of powers and finances to rural local governments, and are therefore suited to be selected for a study of local government performance.

Considering the variable accountability too, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal are suitable for selection because a variety of accountability mechanisms is in place in their respective *Panchayat* (rural local government) systems. West Bengal is unique for being the only major Indian state which has had timely *Panchayat* elections on a party basis regularly since 1978. An important contrast between the two states, relevant to

elections as an accountability mechanism, is that West Bengal has party-based *Panchayat* elections while Madhya Pradesh does not. Madhya Pradesh has made unique efforts to empower the Village Assembly, by transferring significant powers to the single-village level Village Assembly. Similarly, *Panchayat* reforms in West Bengal have introduced mandatory Village Assembly meetings at the grassroots level of the village constituency. Therefore, the interesting contrasts and similarities between the two states can help shed light on different accountability dynamics and the relationship between accountability and performance.

In each state, two local government units (cases) have been compared with each other to discover the determinants of local government performance, and the salience of accountability as a determinant of local government performance. Intra-case analysis of each local government unit is also carried out to trace the causal processes between accountability and performance.

Before elaborating the principles of case selection within each state and identifying the local government units selected for study, it is necessary to briefly state the structure of rural local government in India. The *Panchayat* system of each Indian state is divided into three tiers of district (the highest tier), block (the intermediate tier) and village (the lowest tier). Councils made up of elected representatives are the local government units at each level; therefore the three types of rural local governments or *Panchayats* in each state are the district councils, the block councils and the village councils. In this study, the Village Council (the Indian term for which is *Gram Panchayat*) is the unit of analysis; each Village Council selected constitutes one ‘case’ in this study. Therefore there are two cases in each state, making up a total of four cases.

The choice of cases within each state is done as follows: The chosen dimension of variation between the cases in each state is level of electoral competition, which is an

indicator of accountability (see section on conceptualization and operationalization of variables for details). One GP with a low level of electoral competition and another with a higher level of electoral competition are accordingly selected in each state.

Electoral competition is an appropriate criterion for case selection since it is a pivotal indicator of accountability. The variation introduced around this parameter is consistent with the author's conscious attempt to introduce prior variation or contrast in accountability between the two cases in each state. The prior availability of data on election results of GPs in the two selected states also contributed to the choice of electoral competition as a dimension of variation. The following three-point logic makes variation in electoral competition a suitable technique of introducing variation in accountability between cases—firstly, sanctioning is a pivotal dimension of accountability (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). Secondly, elections represent the most regular and widely available sanctioning mechanism in local government. Thirdly, mere elections are not sufficient to serve as a sanctioning mechanism; electoral competition is critical in this respect (see Chapter 2 for the background of these assumptions).

In keeping with the stated case selection principle, Debipur GP located in Memari-I block of Burdwan district, and Nowdapanur GP of Berhampore block in Murshidabad district are the two West Bengal GPs studied. Debipur GP is a case of low electoral competition, while Nowdapanur GP has a high level of electoral competition. Goutampur Colony GP in Obaidullahgunj block of Raisen district and Ramgarh GP in Narsinghgarh block of Rajgarh district have been covered in the Madhya Pradesh study. The electoral competition level in Goutampur Colony GP is low while a higher level of such competition is seen in Ramgarh GP. The cases selected in the two states and their

characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The characteristics of the chosen GPs in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh can be seen in the Appendix.

Table 1: Selected Cases in Both States

GP Characteristics	Selected GPs (with location)	
	West Bengal	Madhya Pradesh
Lower electoral competition	Debipur GP (Burdwan District)	Goutampur Colony GP (Raisen District)
Higher electoral competition	Nowdapanur GP (Murshidabad District)	Ramgarh GP (Rajgarh District)

Source: The author's case selection

This study relies on cross-sectional or spatial variation (that is, comparing different cases at a given point in time) rather than temporal variation (comparing different time periods).¹⁵ The field research for this study has been conducted in three phases between August 2009 and April 2010: August-October 2009 and December 2009-January 2010 in West Bengal, and February-April 2010 in Madhya Pradesh.

Research Design: Levels of Analysis

This study aims to investigate the relationship between accountability and performance through three specific strategies. The first strategy is to explore and uncover the causal processes between the two variables. The second strategy is to discover the association between accountability and performance through the appropriate form of comparison. The third strategy is to avoid narrowness in overall findings by carrying out the study in two local government systems that vary in terms of their institutional structure. The

¹⁵The data gathered is mostly for the financial year 2008-09, though data for other years has been used with respect to some indicators of accountability and performance. On every indicator used in the study, cases have been compared with each other using data for the same year.

three levels of this study have been decided with a view to execute these three strategies.

Intra-Case Analysis

Delving into a single case allows a detailed observation of causal processes (Gerring 2007). The intra-case analysis of each selected case (GP) in this study is carried out to measure accountability and performance for each case, trace the causal processes between them, and also assess the other variables of the study. This level of analysis is important for unpacking the complexities operating in the accountability-performance relationship, in terms of mediating conditions and intermediate processes.

Intra-State Comparison of Cases

Two GPs in each state have been compared with each other in this study. Since they belong to the same state, their institutional structure is common. The purpose of such comparison is to control for the autonomy of the GPs (which is determined by legal provisions and rules). The two GPs in each state therefore have the same decision making powers and are also governed by the same legal constraints for e.g. the maximum amount that they can autonomously spend on a single project.

As already stated, variation between these two cases has purposely been introduced with respect to electoral competition. Since the two compared cases in each state are governed by the same *Panchayat* law, the legal features of their accountability mechanisms are also common (though the actual functioning of these mechanisms varies). This makes the two cases suited for comparison with respect to accountability. The aim of the comparison is to rule out differences in institutional structure (specifically differences in the autonomy of GPs) as an explanatory factor behind

observed differences in performance, and discover which variable—accountability, capacity or finances—best explains variation in performance between the GPs in each state.

Inter-State Comparison

Findings derived from the comparison of local governments within a single state might be too narrow to serve as a basis for generalizing about the relationship between accountability and performance. Therefore this study has been conducted in two states. The final conclusions about the salient determinants of local government performance and the relationship between accountability and performance are those that are valid for both the state studies. The deriving of conclusions through two state studies, considering the diverse contexts, institutional structures and accountability mechanisms in the two selected states, adds greater robustness and generalizability to the overall conclusions of the study.

Conceptualization and Operationalization of Variables

One important priority in this study is to develop appropriate conceptual definitions and operational indicators of the variables used, keeping in mind the shortcomings of previous studies. This section presents the conceptual definitions of accountability and performance, as employed in this study, and the dimensions and indicators used to assess them. The operational dimensions and indicators of the other variables of the study can be seen in Chapter 1 (see section on ‘Analytical Framework: Variables and their Relationships’).

Accountability: Concept and Operationalization

Accountability in this study refers to accountability to the people or popular accountability. Accountability of local government to the people has two components--direct (of elected representatives to the people) and indirect (of staff members to elected representatives). Staff members of local government are usually accountable to elected representatives, who in turn are accountable to the people.¹⁶

This study focuses mainly on direct accountability in the assessment of overall accountability. Indirect accountability (in terms of the control of elected representatives over staff members) is also explored, albeit briefly. This study does not find any perceptible variation between the chosen local governments in each state with respect to indirect accountability. Therefore, the variation in accountability between the two cases in each state, as seen in this study, only represents the variation in direct accountability.

Accountability in this study is defined as the degree of popular control that the people (local residents) are able to exert over local government. 'Popular control' ranges from popular voice in the formation and functioning of local government to concrete popular pressure on local government.¹⁷ Such popular control is exercised through the means of sanctioning, monitoring and deliberation. The traditional conception of accountability is associated with the first two dimensions ('monitoring' refers to oversight and 'sanctioning' to punishment), seeing these two dimensions as the instruments through which people hold their governments answerable for their actions. This study however employs a wider understanding of accountability, and borrowing

¹⁶In some exceptional situations, local government staff might be made accountable to the people directly. This is seen in Madhya Pradesh where the Secretary, a staff member of the GP, is made directly accountable to the Village Assembly. Such mechanisms, wherever present, are also included in the assessment of direct accountability in this study.

¹⁷It should be noted that this study uses a process-based concept of accountability, and not an outcome-based concept. In other words, accountability means popular control (voice or pressure) expressed or exercised by the people, and not the actual extent of fulfilment of people's preferences by local government or the allocation of services and benefits by local government according to demographic weights or needs of different groups. See Chapter 2 for a clarification of the process and outcome based concepts of accountability, as stated by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006b).

from Moncrieffe (2001) brings in a third accountability dimension of 'deliberation'. The logic behind such inclusion is that local accountability is distinct in nature from common public accountability, which is usually the focus of authors who have developed the traditional notion of accountability.

One important feature of local accountability is the reflection of popular preferences in a more direct and assured way in the working of local government than is endeavoured in higher levels of government. Therefore, in contrast to central or provincial governance, local governance requires (and makes feasible, due to the small size of jurisdictions) the employment of deliberative mechanisms of accountability such as village assemblies with powers of discussion and decision making. This means that local accountability should be assessed not only in terms of the functioning of monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms such as audits and elections, but also in terms of the working of deliberative mechanisms that are more likely to ensure that popular preferences are brought to bear on the decisions of the local government.

Accountability in this research project has been operationalized in terms of the functioning of only formal accountability mechanisms of local government in terms of their effectiveness in creating popular control, and not in terms of the working of informal mechanisms such as civil society associations, NGOs and mass media. Each dimension of accountability identified in the conceptual scheme--sanctioning, monitoring and deliberation--has been operationalized into observable indicators for the purpose of measurement. The indicators for each dimension pertain to the actual functioning of the available accountability mechanism corresponding to that dimension. Elections are the accountability mechanism corresponding to the sanctioning dimension of accountability. The deliberation dimension of accountability is assessed according to various indicators pertaining to the actual functioning of Village Assembly meetings.

Indicators pertaining to the formal mechanism of popular monitoring known as Social Audit are used to assess the monitoring dimension of accountability. A summary of the dimensions of accountability (with the indicators for each dimension) is given in Table 2, and the detailed description of each dimension can be seen in the following paragraphs.

Table 2: Dimensions of Accountability and their Indicators

Dimension (Mechanism)	Indicators
Sanctioning (Elections)	Proportion of seats not obtained by single largest/ruling party Proportion of contested seats Degree of defeat of incumbent representatives seeking re-election Turnover (change) of single largest or ruling party Voter turnout Freeness of elections
Deliberation (Village Assembly)	Frequency of meetings Extent of people's attendance Inclusiveness of people's attendance Inclusiveness of actual decision making Extent of scrutiny of local government functioning
Monitoring (Social Audit)	Frequency Extent of popular involvement Raising of issues and exposure of grievances Perceived effectiveness (according to elected members and staff)

Source: The author's operationalization

Sanctioning Dimension

While all three dimensions represent important aspects of accountability, the sanctioning dimension is its most crucial dimension. After all, it is the actual punishment (or threat of punishment) of incumbent local government representatives that is likely to be the cornerstone of popular pressure. Elections are the most basic and only available way for voters to punish or reward their elected representatives for their

performance in office, and therefore the most obvious mechanism of sanctioning. However, the mere holding of elections is not enough to ensure effective accountability; electoral competition is critical, as already seen. Elections will be evaluated as a mechanism of sanctioning in this study mainly in terms of their competitiveness, with additional indicators on freeness and voter turnout. The competitiveness indicators are the core or crucial indicators of the sanctioning dimension.

Highly competitive elections are a potent source of popular pressure on incumbent candidates, since more competitive or closely contested elections result in stronger alternatives for people to choose from. Higher electoral competition can provide a stronger threat to the incumbent ruling group and representatives that they can be turned out of office, thereby increasing the effectiveness of elections as a sanctioning mechanism. The first way of assessing electoral competition in each case is to use the relevant indicator pertaining to GP elections, such as relative strength of ruling and opposition groups in the GP, or the proportion of seats filled in a contested manner.¹⁸

While the aforementioned competitiveness indicators pertain to the threat of incumbent representatives or ruling groups being ousted through electoral defeat, other crucial indicators of competitiveness pertain to the actual extent of defeat. These indicators assess the extent of actual defeat of incumbent elected members standing for re-election, and whether or not there is turnover of the ruling group of the GP. Apart from competitiveness indicators, freeness (absence of intimidation) and a high voter turnout are also basic conditions for elections to function as a sanctioning mechanism.

¹⁸Different indicators of electoral competition are relevant in the two chosen states. In West Bengal, which has party based rural local government elections, party-based competition in terms of the percentage of seats not held by the ruling party is relevant as an indicator. In Madhya Pradesh, elections are not conducted on party basis. Here the proportion of representatives chosen through contested election (compared to the proportion elected in uncontested manner) is the relevant competitiveness indicator.

Therefore freeness and voter turnout are included as indicators of the effectiveness of elections.

Deliberation Dimension

Village Assembly meetings constitute the deliberative mechanism of accountability. India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the respective *Panchayat* laws of Indian states have made it mandatory for these meetings to be held. The Village Assembly has, in the chosen Indian states, been bestowed by the respective *Panchayat* laws with certain powers of deliberation (discussion and decision making). Its meetings, through widespread attendance of villagers, are supposed to function as forums for the inclusive expression of villager's preferences. As per the law, such preferences are brought to bear on the GP's decision making in a binding way. As a source of binding decisions that defines the work agenda of the GP, the deliberative mechanism of Village Assembly meetings is a clear source of popular control on the local government, and therefore valid for incorporation in a measurement of accountability.

The functioning of the Village Assembly is assessed according to the following indicators. The first indicator pertains to the frequency of meetings; the regular holding of meetings (at least as many times as required by the law) is basic to the effectiveness of village assemblies as a deliberative mechanism. The extent of people's (local residents') attendance in the meetings is the second indicator. Mere holding of meetings is not a guarantee of their effectiveness; respectable attendance (at least meeting the quota requirement laid down by the law) is necessary, and higher attendance is a crucial indicator of the higher effectiveness of these meetings.

The third indicator to assess the effectiveness of Village Assembly meetings is the inclusiveness of attendance. Mere attendance, though crucial, may not ensure that

various sections of the village population (such as women, marginalized socio-economic groups, and non-partisan people or people holding opposition political views) are attending. If these groups do not attend, then their preferences will fail to find their way into the decisions of the Village Assembly. The fourth indicator assesses the extent of the actual inclusiveness of decision making by the Village Assembly. Here the focus is on evaluating, on the yardstick of inclusiveness, the processes and actors involved in actual decision making by the Village Assembly. Putting it more clearly, this indicator tries to assess if actual decision making of Village Assembly is dominated by the preferences of a few powerful actors, or if the preferences of a wide section of local residents are able to find their place in its decisions.

The final indicator on the deliberation dimension is the extent of scrutiny of GP functioning in the Village Assembly meetings. Village Assembly meetings allow villagers to interrogate their elected representatives, and also scrutinize and ratify important GP records such as the budget and annual plan of work. The extent of popular scrutiny of GP functioning in Village Assembly meetings would indicate the extent to which local residents are taking interest in, evaluating and commenting on the functioning of the GP.

Monitoring Dimension

The mechanism of popular monitoring in the GPs of the chosen Indian states is Social Audit. In this study, 'Social Audit' means a systematic and institutionalized procedure of review, not by upper levels of government, but by the local residents themselves. Social Audit in this sense is being carried out only for only one area of GP functioning in the chosen states, which is the implementation of India's National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (NREGA).¹⁹ Social Audit can potentially generate effective public scrutiny and visibility of the GP, and may uncover irregularities and incompetence in GP functioning. If effective, Social Audit would keep GP members on their toes and thus act as a significant source of popular pressure.

Specific indicators related to the effectiveness of Social Audit assess not just its frequency, but also the extent of meaningful popular participation in Social Audits. The two GPs in each state are therefore compared with each other for the number of times that each has held Social Audit, and also whether a popular assembly of villagers is given a role in the Social Audit process. In the absence of such assembly being convened, the Social Audit exercise becomes the preserve of a few local elites and devoid of people's involvement. The actual functioning of Social Audit is also evaluated through its success in identifying irregularities or grievances. The final indicator is about the effectiveness of Social Audit in the GP as perceived by the GP's elected members and staff. The above indicators together provide a cumulative measure of the effectiveness with which Social Audit is being carried out in a particular GP.

Performance: Concept and Operationalization

In this study, performance is understood in terms of service delivery--outputs of local government and people's satisfaction with those outputs. The efficiency-effectiveness-responsiveness-equity scheme developed in the performance measurement literature (see Chapter 2) is a comprehensive framework and a valuable guide to assess performance, with a balance of objective and subjective, quantitative and qualitative indicators. All the four parameters of the scheme might not, however, be applicable to all functional areas or types of outputs. It is important to use, for each type

¹⁹ NREGA is not just an employment generation programme but also a programme to create infrastructural assets for the improvement of the quality of life in the villages.

of output, parameters that are most directly relevant to the functionality of the particular output (that is, the fulfilment of the purpose behind its provision). Furthermore, the same parameters might not be equally important in the context of developed and developing countries. In developing countries (especially in rural areas) a consideration such as efficiency in spending is secondary, and the mere availability of certain amenities such as concrete roads may be considered an achievement in service delivery (Crook and Manor 1998) since it leads to a noticeable improvement in the living standards of the rural people.

The use of the term ‘responsiveness’, as stated in the operational scheme in the performance measurement literature, is problematic. Different authors have defined this term differently, some seeing it in terms of congruence of outputs with needs, while others see it in terms of characteristics such as speed, timeliness etc. that are related to service quality. Essentially, this is a measure of people’s satisfaction with service delivery. Therefore the use of the term ‘popular satisfaction with outputs’ is preferable in place of ‘responsiveness’, and it indicates congruence of outputs with popular preferences.

This study focuses on an evaluation of performance of GPs in two selected functional areas viz. rural infrastructure (rural roads, drinking water sources, water bodies, bridges, drains and other construction activities) and alternative primary education.²⁰ Different indicators are applied to each functional area, keeping in mind their suitability for assessing performance in the concerned area. The operational scheme employed in this study covers a combination of objective and perception based

²⁰Alternative primary education has been chosen because GPs have a greater role to play with respect to the functioning of alternative primary schools than mainstream primary schools which are controlled by the state government’s board of primary education. These schools are called SSKs in West Bengal and EGS schools in Madhya Pradesh. ²¹GPs have the responsibility of executing specific infrastructural projects carried out under these programmes. Village assemblies propose the specific works (along with their location) to be carried out under these programmes and GPs are responsible to implement the works proposed by the village assemblies.

indicators for a balanced and robust assessment of performance. The summary of indicators used to measure performance in the selected functional areas is given in Table 3, and the details can be read below. For the purpose of measurement, each functional area corresponds to one ‘dimension’ of performance.

Table 3: Dimensions and Indicators of Performance

Dimension or Functional Area	Sub-Dimension	Indicators
Infrastructure	Effectiveness of outputs (objective measure)	Ratio of actual output to targeted output Proportion of completed works among works taken up for implementation
	Villagers’ satisfaction with infrastructural assets	Satisfaction with quality of roads Satisfaction with quality of drinking water sources Satisfaction with accessibility of drinking water sources
Alternative primary education	Availability of facilities of schools (objective measure)	Availability of own building Availability of toilets Availability of drinking water source Classroom grade ratio
	Teacher satisfaction	Perception of teachers regarding facilities of schools Satisfaction of teachers regarding support received from the GP

Source: The author’s operationalization

Performance Assessment in Infrastructure Provision

The available output data for infrastructure is in the form of outputs of specific central and state government programmes (for example NREGA, State Finance Commission funds and Central Finance Commission fund) that are implemented by the GPs in the

chosen states.²¹ The two sub-dimensions used to measure performance in infrastructure provision are effectiveness and popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets.

The first effectiveness measure employed is the proportion of the works that were actually completed among the targeted works of the GP. This effectiveness indicator, however, is not sufficient because it does not reveal the proportion of works completed from among the works actually taken up for implementation. Therefore, an additional effectiveness indicator is used, that reveals the proportion of completed infrastructural works among the projects actually taken up for implementation. The data for the above indicators has been obtained from GP records. The data for the different programmes in the area of infrastructure are cumulatively considered to assess overall effectiveness.

The second sub-dimension in the functional area of infrastructure is popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets such as roads and constructed drinking water sources.²² Mere outputs of local government might not be a conclusive measure of their impact on local residents. What matters is that local residents benefit from and feel satisfied with these outputs. This reason makes popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets the crucial parameter in the area of infrastructure.²³ Popular satisfaction with

²¹GPs have the responsibility of executing specific infrastructural projects carried out under these programmes. Village assemblies propose the specific works (along with their location) to be carried out under these programmes and GPs are responsible to implement the works proposed by the village assemblies.

²²Roads and constructed drinking water sources are categories of infrastructural outputs that are normally delivered by GPs, and not by the higher levels of government.

²³Some may argue that satisfaction with infrastructural assets reflects the performance of past incumbent local councils as well, and not just of the present incumbent council. However, one should note that the quality of infrastructural assets constructed earlier depends significantly upon the repair and up-gradation work done by the present council. The author acknowledges that there is a degree of durability or continuity in this indicator of performance, in the sense that the performance of earlier councils does affect it. Corresponding to such continuity in performance, this study incorporates some elements of continuity or durability in the assessment of accountability. Electoral competitiveness, the main indicator of the sanctioning dimension of accountability, considers the election results of two successive local government elections to note a trend. The use of villager survey responses to assess some indicators of the deliberation dimension of accountability sheds light on enduring patterns in the actual functioning of the deliberative mechanism, unlike the data taken from local government records that sheds light on functioning of the mechanism for one year (2008-09) only.

infrastructural outputs is operationalized through two indicators of quality satisfaction and accessibility satisfaction. These satisfaction indicators are measured through the results of the villager survey employed in each chosen GP. In the survey, villagers were asked about their satisfaction with the physical condition of the roads and drinking water sources (quality satisfaction) and whether they found the drinking water sources to be located at a convenient distance from their homes (accessibility satisfaction).

Performance Assessment in Alternative Primary Education

GPs in the two chosen states have the specific responsibility of providing basic facilities to alternative primary schools. The availability or otherwise of basic facilities in these schools therefore directly reflects the performance of the concerned GP. Therefore GP performance for the domain of alternative primary education is assessed in terms of the availability of basic facilities of alternative primary schools in the GP area such as their availability of own building, availability of functioning drinking water source, availability of functioning toilets, and number of classrooms compared to number of grades.

Apart from the above objective measures, the satisfaction of alternative primary school teachers with the facilities of the school and the degree of support received from the GP is also considered for an overall assessment of GP performance in the functional area of alternative primary education.

Data Gathering and Data Analysis

This study has drawn on diverse data sources. The first part of this section elaborates the sources from which data for the study has been gathered. The techniques of data analysis employed are elaborated in the latter half of this section.

The Gathering of Data

Three major methods of data collection have been used in this study: structured survey interview of samples of local residents (villagers), semi-structured elite interview and document analysis of local government records. The author supplemented data from the above sources with insights obtained from direct observation during her fieldwork period.

Survey of Villagers

In each GP covered in this study, a sample of villagers was selected in order to administer a structured interview. The survey questions were designed to assess relevant indicators of accountability (such as attendance and speaking in village assembly meetings) and performance (satisfaction with roads and drinking water sources). The sample of sixteen villagers for each GP²⁴ was chosen on the basis of the quota sampling method, with a view to make it representative of the actual characteristics of the GP population on the parameters of gender, and caste (with reference to the general, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories).²⁵ The proportion of subjects for each category (female, male, SC, ST, general) was chosen on the basis of available census data to reflect the actual distribution of these categories in the population. The subjects were chosen through the means of household visit in the GP area (calling non-selectively on households in selected localities and

²⁴The sample size was decided at sixteen villagers for each GP in order to evenly represent various localities (villages/ settlements/constituency areas) of each GP. The two chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs have three and four constituent localities (villages and settlements) respectively. West Bengal GPs are much larger with one chosen GP having twelve and the other having seventeen constituency areas. The author chose four constituency areas in each West Bengal GP (to represent both ruling party and opposition controlled constituencies). To evenly represent four localities of each GP, the author fixed the sample size at sixteen for each GP (4x4=16).

²⁵ 'General' as a sampling category in this study refers to all non-SC and non-ST subjects. In the Madhya Pradesh, general category subjects also include OBC (Other Backward Classes) subjects.

neighbourhoods).²⁶ A total of 64 villagers belonging to the four GPs covered (16x4=64) have been personally interviewed by the author in this study through villager survey.

Elite Interviewing

Elite interviews in this study have been used as a source of qualitative insights to assess relevant aspects of accountability, performance and the causal processes between them, and also relevant aspects of primary performance determinants such as capacity. They have also been used to supplement and check the reliability of data from GP records. Elite interviews revealing the attitudes of subjects are also a data source used in assessing the secondary independent variable 'preferences of decision makers'.

The elite subjects fall under several categories: The first category is the elected representatives at the GP level. The subjects interviewed in this category are the members representing each village (in Madhya Pradesh) or chosen constituency (in West Bengal) of each GP, along with the GP chairperson (known as *Pradhan* in West Bengal and *Sarpanch* in Madhya Pradesh) and the chairpersons of the GP's functional committees on education and public health, and infrastructure (in West Bengal).²⁷ In the Madhya Pradesh study, both current and former elected representatives were interviewed since new GPs, almost entirely made up of first time incumbents lacking experience, had just been constituted at the time of fieldwork (February-April 2010).. The spouses of some reticent female representatives, who function as de facto representatives, were also interviewed. The total number of GP elected representatives (and their spouses) interviewed for this study is 31.

²⁶In the West Bengal study, the author purposefully selected four localities, and in the Madhya Pradesh study the author covered all the localities in the GP (see previous footnote). Within these localities, the author purposefully visited specific neighbourhoods (populated by people of particular caste categories) to fill the caste-based quotas in the sample.

²⁷The *Sarpanch* is the ex-officio chairperson of the functional committees of the GP in Madhya Pradesh.

The second category of elite subjects comprises elected representatives at the block and district level *Panchayats* (rural councils) corresponding to the four chosen GPs. The subjects interviewed in this category were the chairpersons of the education and infrastructure standing committees of the block and district level *Panchayats*, representatives of the chosen GPs in the block *Panchayats* and the chairpersons of the block level *Panchayats*. A total of eleven block and district level elected representatives were interviewed.

The third category comprised members of the staff/bureaucracy. This consisted of GP staff members and bureaucrats of the district and block *Panchayats* corresponding to each GP. A total of seven GP staff members and seven block and district bureaucrats were interviewed.

The fourth category comprised teachers of alternative primary schools in the chosen GPs of both the states. These subjects have been interviewed specifically to obtain insights on GP performance in the functional area of alternative primary education. The total number of teachers interviewed is sixteen, covering a total of seven schools for both state studies.

Apart from all these categories of semi-structured elite interviews (that are common to the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies) there was one category of elite subjects unique to the West Bengal study viz. the secretaries of the intermediary organization known as *Gram Unnayan Samiti* (Village Development Committee) or GUS.²⁸ A total of seven GUS secretaries were interviewed for this study.

In addition to the interviews of various categories of functionaries stated above, the author interviewed a few miscellaneous elite subjects. These included experts in the state capitals of Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, interviewed for a better

²⁸There is no equivalent of the GUS in the actual functioning of the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs.

understanding of the functioning of *Panchayats* in each state. These diverse authoritative subjects comprised--a senior official in the *Panchayats* and Rural Development Department of the Government of West Bengal, an experienced functionary of a well-known Madhya Pradesh NGO, a journalist working with a Hindi Language daily in Madhya Pradesh who covers rural affairs, and highly ranked bureaucratic personnel in the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh State Election Commissions. The miscellaneous interviews also included those of two trainers of GP members in West Bengal, two politicians in Madhya Pradesh, an NGO co-ordinator in Berhampore Block, two elderly villagers in Ramgarh GP, and an anonymous school teacher in Goutampur Colony GP in Madhya Pradesh. The total number of miscellaneous elite interview subjects was thirteen.

Adding up the subjects in all the categories above, the total number of elite interview subjects for this study is 92. All interviews (whether villager survey or elite) were personally conducted in the local language (Bengali in West Bengal and Hindi in Madhya Pradesh) by the author. All interview responses have been translated by the author into English.

Document Analysis

The perusal of local government records has yielded objective data on the physical outputs of GPs, which has been used to assess the effectiveness indicator of GP performance. Information from GP records about proceedings and attendance in Village Assembly meetings has been used to measure the relevant operational indicators of accountability. Minutes of GP meetings, external audit and self-evaluation reports of GPs, GP budgets and income-expenditure reports have all been examined to obtain a thorough understanding of GP functioning, and to reveal insights on important

variables, such as the financial strength of the GPs. Data on GP election results have been obtained from the State Election Commissions of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

Data on the institutional structure of GPs in each state (including the laws determining the features of the formal accountability mechanisms) and the rules related to the programmes implemented by GPs are of obvious importance to the study. The actual operation of GPs makes sense only when their institutional structure and legal constraints are clearly understood. Such data has mainly been obtained from various state government publications, including the *Panchayat* Act of each state.

Data Analysis and Inference

This study uses a qualitative methodology to analyse data and arrive at inferences. Yet some data gathered is in numerical form, like, the physical output figures of GPs, attendance figures in Village Assembly meetings and election result figures. Simple arithmetic operations such as calculation of averages, percentages and ratios have been applied to assess relevant numerical indicators of accountability and performance (such as 'effectiveness' indicators of performance, and the Village Assembly attendance indicator of accountability) and other variables (such as financial strength). Simple comparison of magnitude of these numerical measures between the two chosen GPs in each state has been carried out.

The non-numerical data is of two types: (a) interview responses, from elite interviews and villager survey (b) data from documents and publications. Interview responses have been subjected to scrutiny in order to discover patterns and important insights. The villager survey interviews have both closed ended responses and open ended responses, while the elite interview responses are open ended. Simple summary

statistics like percentages have been applied to the closed-ended responses of the villager survey interview, to assess relevant indicators such as the extent of satisfaction of villagers with the quality of physical outputs. Close scrutiny for discovering patterns and insights has naturally been applied to open ended responses (from both elite and villager survey interviews) since the patterns in these responses are often not readily obvious.

The drawing of inferences from data in this study has been employed for three tasks: Firstly, to assess indicators of accountability, performance and other variables; secondly, to arrive at aggregate measures of accountability and performance and the other crucial variables in the study; thirdly, to investigate the causal relationships between accountability (and other possible performance determinants) and performance.

While this study employs a qualitative methodology, it is inspired in one sense by quantitative methodology. This inspiration reflects in the construction of specific dimensions and indicators for assessment of variables, which lends precision to the process of investigation. The actual aggregate assessment of accountability and performance (and their respective dimensions) is however done qualitatively, and not through the construction of numerical scores or indexes. The assessment of indicators of accountability, performance and other variables in the study has been done through the analysis of numerical or non-numerical data obtained through direct observation, document analysis and the analysis of villager survey and elite interview responses. Since the method used to execute the task of measuring indicators has already been described, the techniques used for carrying out the other two tasks of inference are elaborated below.

Assessment of Measures of Variables

The development of an aggregate assessment of multi-dimensional variables such as accountability and performance involves firstly, a combination of their relevant indicators into dimensions, and then combining the assessed dimensions into an overall measure of the variable. In combining indicators into dimensions, a case that is assessed as being higher on all the indicators of a dimension is obviously inferred as having done better on that dimension. For instance, a case having done better on all the indicators of the deliberation dimension of accountability would be inferred as being better on the whole dimension. A case that is superior on all the indicators/sub-dimensions of the infrastructure area of performance would be assessed as having the higher performance in that area. However, where the evidence is more conflicting, then there is a weighing of evidence to infer which case has done better for the whole dimension. A case that is ahead on a higher number of indicators, or that has clearly done better on crucial sub-dimensions/indicators (if any) is assessed as being the superior one for that dimension.²⁹

The combination of dimensions into an aggregate measure of the concerned variable is done as follows: a case that is ahead on a higher number of dimensions is generally rated as higher for the variable. In measuring accountability, a case assessed as superior on all three dimensions or on two dimensions (including the crucial sanctioning dimension) would clearly be seen as having higher accountability. Having said so, the evidence might not always be so clear; one case might have done better on the crucial sanctioning dimension of accountability but another might be ahead on the

²⁹With respect to the accountability dimensions of deliberation and monitoring, no specific indicator has been identified as a crucial indicator. Therefore, being ahead on a majority of indicators is used as the yardstick to assess a case as being higher on each of these accountability dimensions. In the sanctioning dimension of accountability, the competitiveness indicators are the crucial or core indicators. In measuring the infrastructure dimension of performance, the 'satisfaction with infrastructural assets' sub-dimension is the crucial set of indicators.

other two dimensions. In such an event, there is a weighing and balancing of evidence in order to arrive at an assessment about which case has higher aggregate accountability. Chapter 4 and 5 of this thesis show how this author has assessed accountability in the chosen cases, illustrating in Chapter 5 the weighing of evidence that is used as a basis for arriving at inferences.

With respect to performance, too, a similar logic would apply, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. A case that is superior on both the functional areas (dimensions) of performance would clearly be seen as having higher performance. However, the evidence would be more conflicting when one case does better in one area and the other on the other area. Given such a situation, there would be qualitative weighing and balancing of evidence on the various constituent sub-dimensions of the two areas in order to arrive at a judgment about which case has overall higher performance. The illustration of the methods of assessment of performance can be seen in Chapter 6.

Investigation of Causality

Three methodological parameters, or conditions, are laid down for investigating the causal relationship between accountability and performance. The first condition is the association between variables, as evident from the comparison between the two cases in each state. If a case which has higher overall accountability also has higher overall performance compared to the other case, then this condition will be met. Secondly, if such association is evident, then there should also be convincing evidence of causal processes (causal mechanisms) showing the positive impact of accountability on performance.

Causality as inferred in any one state on the basis of the first two steps is not sufficient for the inference of causality for the whole study. The third condition of causality being inferred in the West Bengal study as well as the Madhya Pradesh study should also be met for a robust inference of the causal relationship between accountability and performance. The causal relationship between other likely performance determinants (such as finances and capacity) and performance should also meet the test of the above three conditions.

Methodological Limitations

The small number of cases covered is the most significant methodological weakness of this study. This study makes inferences about the accountability-performance relationship by covering only four cases. Time and resource constraints, together with the imperative of subjecting each case to in-depth examination, are the reasons for the inability to study a larger number of cases. It cannot be denied that the use of a larger number of cases would increase robustness and generalizability of findings, provided that appropriate techniques of comparison were employed. On the other hand, this study attempts to ameliorate the weakness of using a small number of cases by employing sensible case selection and comparison techniques. As already stated, case selection and comparison in this study are based on a combination of control of an important variable with purposeful variation in other significant conditions. Given the shortcomings in each single state comparative study (that uses only two cases), final conclusions have been drawn using findings from two state studies to increase their generalizability.

The findings derived from the villager survey interview have to be looked at keeping in mind the small sample size of sixteen persons for each GP. The limited randomness is another weakness, given the fact that subjects have not been selected on

the basis of a sampling frame (such as a list of households). The author has consciously tried to maintain variation in the sample in terms of gender and caste quotas, and also in terms of visiting different localities and neighbourhoods in each GP. The sample is representative of the GP population with respect to the categories of caste and gender. The actual survey respondents are quite diverse not only in terms of caste and gender but also in terms of economic, occupational and educational status, political affiliation and organizational affiliation.

This study employs a cross-sectional research design (different cases compared at a given point of time), which means that the only dimension of variation is spatial. The lack of availability of records for earlier time-periods and the imperative of conducting the study within a short time frame are the reasons for this study's inability to include temporal (time-based) variation. The incorporation of temporal in addition to the existing spatial variation would increase the robustness of inferences about the accountability-performance relationship. The drawing of inferences on the basis of comparison between different cases would no doubt be more robust if long term trends in accountability and performance (in contrast to accountability and performance assessments for a given year) were used as a basis for such inference.

This study attributes variation in overall local government performance to a few primary and secondary independent variables (see framework of variables in Chapter 1). The actual world of local government performance is very complex, and it is likely that various other variables also sometimes affect local government performance. This study, for instance, acknowledges that upward accountability has a likely impact on local government performance, but is unable to gauge the extent of such impact or notice variation in upward accountability between cases. This also brings us to the difficulty of measuring all variables that have a bearing on local government

performance. Extraneous variables such as land and labour availability are also excluded from the framework adopted in this study. Such extraneous variables might directly affect specific aspects of performance; they do not, however, make a significant difference to overall local government performance. Wherever the impact of extraneous variables on specific aspects of local government performance is noticed--for instance the impact of labour availability on output performance under the programme known as NREGA--such impact is mentioned in this study.

While this study possesses the above mentioned methodological weaknesses, it also possesses methodological strengths - such as careful case selection, meticulous operationalization of variables, and employment of multiple levels of analysis and appropriate comparative techniques to compensate for these weaknesses. These methodological strengths have facilitated a nuanced and comprehensive examination of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government, and generated robust and insightful findings.

CHAPTER 4

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WEST BENGAL CASES

This chapter is concerned with an evaluation of accountability in the chosen local government units of West Bengal. It accordingly discusses the legal provisions defining the various accountability mechanisms, and evaluates their actual functioning in the two chosen GPs of this state. The first three parts of the chapter pertain to assessments of the sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring dimensions of accountability respectively, for the two chosen GPs.

While the first three sections are concerned with direct accountability of GP elected representatives to the people, the fourth section of this chapter assesses the accountability of GP staff towards elected representatives (indirect accountability). Because of the absence of noticeable variation between the chosen GPs with respect to indirect accountability, the variation in overall accountability between the two GPs only represents the variation in direct accountability. The concluding section of the chapter provides an assessment of the aggregate level of accountability in the chosen GPs, based on the three dimensions of direct accountability.

The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability

Elections in local government serve as a mechanism of sanctioning, giving voters the power to remove from office representatives who fail to meet their expectations. In West Bengal's rural local government (*Panchayat*) system, elections remain the only mechanism of popular sanctioning because the Right to Recall provision is not provided in its *Panchayat* law. This section contains a comparative analysis of the sanctioning dimension of accountability between the two chosen cases in West Bengal—Debipur GP

and Nowdapanur GP—with respect to the effectiveness of elections as a sanctioning mechanism. Table 4 presents the summary of the comparison between the two GPs with respect to the various indicators pertaining to the sanctioning dimension (see Chapter 3 for a description of the various indicators and their suitability). The main emphasis in comparing the sanctioning dimension between the two cases is on showing their differences in the degree of electoral competition.

Table 4: The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability: Effectiveness of Elections in the Two West Bengal GPs (2003 and 2008 *Panchayat* Elections)

Indicators	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>			
	Debipur GP		Nowdapanur GP	
	2003	2008	2003	2008
Proportion of seats not obtained by single largest party	1/23 (4.3%)	3/20 (15%)	7/18 (38.9%)	8/14 (57.1%)
Proportion of contested seats	15/23 (65.2%)	17/20 (85%)	16/18 (88.9%)	14/14 (100%)
Degree of defeat of incumbent representatives seeking re-election	No data	One incumbent sought re-election and won	No data	Two out of six incumbents seeking re-election lost
Turnover of the incumbent single largest/ruling party	No data	No	No data	No change in single largest party. Ruling party lost majority
Voter turnout	87.5%	84.88%	93.5%	90.52%
Freeness of elections	No data	No coercion or intimidation of voters	No data	No coercion or intimidation of voters

Source: Data on first five indicators obtained from West Bengal State Election Commission (West Bengal State Election Commission 2003a, 2003b, 2008) and Berhampore Block (BDO) Office. Data on freeness of elections obtained from villager survey interviews carried out by the author

Proportion of Seats Not Won by Single-Largest Party

West Bengal has party-based *Panchayat* elections right down to the lowest level of the GP. Therefore, it is appropriate to evaluate electoral competitiveness in West Bengal GPs on the basis of the proportion of seats that the ruling or single largest political party failed to capture. A high proportion of such seats indicates a high degree of electoral competitiveness.

As per the results of the last *Panchayat* elections (held in 2008), Debipur GP is characterized by a heavy dominance of the ruling party, the Communist Party of India Marxist [CPI (M)], whereas the other chosen GP, Nowdapanur GP is characterized by a much more competitive scenario. Table 4 shows that only three out of the twenty seats of Debipur GP were not in the hands of the ruling party; as many as 17 out of 20 seats were won by CPI (M), the ruling party in this GP (West Bengal State Election Commission 2008). In Nowdapanur GP, the single largest party was Congress (I), also known as Indian National Congress (INC). More than half of the seats of this GP were not in the hands of the single largest party (see Table 4). The INC was able to win only 42.8% of the seats in Nowdapanur GP and therefore was not able to obtain a majority on its own, as per data obtained from the Berhampore block (BDO) office. It formed a ruling alliance by entering into a partnership with two Muslim League members.

The 2003 *Panchayat* election results, together with the 2008 results, illustrate a trend of the widely varying degrees of electoral competition between the two GPs. In 2003, the CPI (M) failed to win only one out of 23 seats in Debipur GP, capturing an overwhelming 95.6% of the seats (West Bengal State Election Commission 2003b, 215-17). In Nowdapanur GP, the INC was able to capture a majority in the 2003 elections, winning 61.1% of the seats, and failing to win seven out of 18 seats (West Bengal State Election Commission 2003a, 424-26)

Proportion of Contested Seats

A higher proportion of seats filled in a contested manner is an indicator of higher competitiveness of elections. When a candidate for a particular seat faces contest from other competing candidates, then that seat becomes a contested seat. When only one candidate seeks election for a particular seat, with no other candidate contesting for that seat, then that candidate is said to be elected from the concerned seat in an uncontested manner.

The proportion of GP representatives elected in a contested manner is higher for Nowdapanur GP, showing its higher electoral competitiveness. Nowdapanur GP had no member elected in an uncontested manner for the 2008 elections; all its members were elected in a contested manner. Debipur GP had seventeen out of 20 members elected in a contested manner and three members elected in uncontested manner in the same elections. In the 2003 elections, fifteen members out of a total of 23 (65.2%) were elected in a contested manner in Debipur GP, while in Nowdapanur GP, sixteen members, out of a total of eighteen (88.9%) were elected in a contested manner (Government of West Bengal 2003a, 2003b).

Degree of Electoral Defeat of Incumbent Representatives

Electoral competitiveness can also be assessed from the rate of turnover of incumbent representatives between elections. If incumbent representatives stand for re-election, and there is evidence of replacement of such candidates by new representatives, then we can speculate about the possibility that voters are punishing incumbents who failed to meet their expectations. A high rate of defeat of representatives who seek re-election

indicates a high degree of competitive pressure on incumbent local government representatives.

In Debipur GP, only one incumbent representative from the previous term sought re-election in the 2008 *Panchayat* elections, and was successfully re-elected (West Bengal State Election Commission 2003b, 2008). Therefore, there was no defeat of incumbent GP members contesting re-election in Debipur GP. In Nowdapanur GP, we find that six incumbent candidates sought re-election in the 2008 *Panchayat* elections, four of whom were successfully re-elected and two sitting members were defeated (West Bengal State Election Commission 2003a, 2008). Therefore we do see the operation of turnover through electoral defeat to some (albeit a small) degree in Nowdapanur GP.

One possible reason behind only one incumbent GP member of Debipur GP contesting re-election might be the very high percentage of reserved seats in Debipur GP,³⁰ together with the rotation of reserved seats, which can prevent incumbent members willing to contest re-election from doing so. Thirteen out of the total of 20 seats (65% of seats) of Debipur GP were reserved for women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) collectively in the 2008 *Panchayat* elections, as per data obtained from the Memari-I block administration office. Seats reserved in one election for a particular category are not reserved for that category in the next election, because the West Bengal *Panchayat* election laws stipulate reservation by rotation. This can prevent sitting members from standing for election in two ways: firstly, a seat that is

³⁰As mandated by the India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment and West Bengal's *Panchayat* election law, there is reservation of 1/3 seats for women, and for SCs and STs on the basis of the proportion of their population to the total population of the GP area (Government of West Bengal 2003, Section 17). Only those constituencies are eligible for SC and ST reservation in which the proportion of SC and ST population to total population is not less than half (Government of West Bengal 2006, Rule 22). The selection of constituencies from a list of eligible constituencies meant to be reserved for SCs and STs is done on a rotational basis for a period of three general elections. The reservation of seats/constituencies for women is also done on rotational basis for a period of three *Panchayat* elections (Government of West Bengal 2006, Rule 22).

unreserved in one election might be reserved in the next election, which means that an incumbent who does not belong to that reserved category cannot contest from that seat in the next election. Secondly, a seat that is reserved in one election might be de-reserved for that category in the next election: this means that the candidate from the reserved category (belonging to marginalized groups such as women, SCs or STs) might not have the incentive to contest in the next election for fear of defeat in open competition against general candidates.

Furthermore political parties too usually place candidate belonging to reserved categories only in reserved constituencies, even though the election law does not bar the contesting of candidates from reserved categories in general, unreserved constituencies. Nowdapanur GP has a much smaller percentage of reserved seats compared to Debipur GP: only five seats out of the total 14 (35.71%) were reserved in the 2008 *Panchayat* elections, as per data obtained from the Berhampore block administration office. All these were reserved for women. Debipur GP has a large SC and ST population compared to Nowdapanur GP, which explains the higher percentage of reserved seats in the former, which in turn explains to an extent why only one incumbent GP member of Debipur GP sought re-election in the 2008 elections.

Turnover of Ruling/Single-Largest Party

In addition to turnover of individual incumbent representatives, it is also useful to consider the turnover of single largest party or ruling party as an indicator of competitiveness of elections. In both the GPs, there was no change in single largest party between the 2003 and 2008 *Panchayat* elections. In Debipur GP, the ruling party CPI (M) won overwhelming majorities in both the 2003 and 2008 elections. In Nowdapanur GP, the INC failed to obtain a majority in the 2008 election and had to

concede to the selection of a GP *Pradhan* (chairperson) from the party supporting it, the Muslim League. A no-confidence motion passed within the GP against the *Pradhan* belonging to the Muslim League and support for the INC's *Pradhan* candidate from two independent members resulted in an INC member obtaining the position of *Pradhan* in late 2009.

Voter Turnout

The voter turnout for a GP refers to the percentage of the GP's registered voters who actually voted. For the 2008 *Panchayat* elections, both Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP had extremely high voter turnouts, and a slightly higher turnout was seen in the electorally more competitive GP, that is, Nowdapanur GP (see Table 4). One villager survey respondent in Nowdapanur GP (an elderly SC lady), when asked whether she voted in the last *Panchayat* election, replied, "Obviously one has to vote" (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). This attitude seems typical of the village folk, for voting is considered an essential duty.

Freeness of Election

The villager survey respondents in both the GPs chosen for study were asked about whether they voted freely in the 2008 *Panchayat* elections or whether they felt any coercion or intimidation inflicted by political parties or election candidates. In Debipur GP, thirteen respondents out of sixteen had voted, and all thirteen stated that there was no coercion or intimidation. In Nowdapanur GP, all sixteen respondents had voted, and all sixteen stated that they had voted according to their free choice, there being no coercion or intimidation.

Overall Effectiveness of Sanctioning Mechanism

It can be seen from Table 4 and the above account that the degree of electoral competitiveness was higher in Nowdapanur GP than in Debipur GP. There is no major difference between the two GPs on the other indicators related to voter turnout and freeness of election. Nowdapanur GP therefore does better than Debipur GP on the sanctioning dimension of accountability.

In Debipur GP, the overwhelming dominance of CPI (M) implies that there is no feasible alternative to replace the CPI (M) as a ruling party or coalition. In Nowdapanur GP, the close electoral contestation between the political parties and their candidates indicates that there is greater possibility of the ruling party being replaced in elections, and also greater real choice in the hands of voters. This has positive implications for accountability as popular control. The higher competitiveness of elections in Nowdapanur GP implies that the competitive pressure on the incumbent ruling party and its representatives in this GP is relatively higher, and people have strong alternatives to turn to should they decide to vote out their incumbent representatives or ruling party.

The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability

There is provision for two types of deliberative forums—*Gram Sabha* (Village Assembly) meetings and *Gram Sansad* (Village Constituency-level Assembly) meetings—in West Bengal's *Panchayat* Law. The former are held at the level of the entire GP and the latter are held at the level of the electoral constituencies into which GPs are divided for the purpose of *Panchayat* elections (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 2). *Gram Sansad* and *Gram Sabha* meetings are forums in which voters

(village residents whose names are on the electoral list) meet in a particular venue at a pre-decided time, and participate in discussion and decision making on matters related to GP governance. Elected members and staff members of the GP are required to be present in these meetings. The meetings of each *Gram Sansad* are required to be held at least twice a year; the half-yearly meeting is to be held in November and the annual meeting is to be held in May. There is no legal bar on holding additional meetings. The *Gram Sabha* meeting of every GP is supposed to be held once a year, in December every year.

The quorum for holding *Gram Sansad* meetings has been fixed at 10%; if less than 1/10th of the voters are present in a particular *Gram Sansad* meeting, then the meeting is postponed to exactly a week later (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 16A); the quorum requirement for the postponed meeting is 5% (Government of West Bengal 2008a). The quorum for holding *Gram Sabha* meetings is 5% or 1/20th of all voters; the meeting is postponed to a week later in the absence of a quorum, and there is no quorum requirement for the postponed meeting (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 16B).

Gram Sansads have been given significant powers. The *Gram Sansad* has the power to identify beneficiaries, or lay down principles for identification of beneficiaries, for various welfare or poverty alleviation programmes. It also has the power to suggest specific development works ('schemes') to be taken up under central and state government development programmes that are being implemented by the GP (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 16A). The recommendations of the *Gram Sansad*, related to selection of both beneficiaries and works, are binding on the GP, as per the law (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 16A). The GP is required to place in *Gram Sansad* and *Gram Sabha* meetings, for discussion, comments and

approval, a number of records. These include the budget of GP for the following year, latest audit report of the GP, the income-expenditure report of the previous year, beneficiary lists of different welfare programmes, a report on work done by the GP in the previous year, and the annual action plan for the coming year (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 17A).

Gram Sansad meetings in practice are more important than *Gram Sabha* meetings because it is through *Gram Sansad* meetings that popular inputs are actually brought to bear on the decision process. The GP-level *Gram Sabha* meetings usually are only used for a final popular endorsement of the action plan and budget of the GP, before these records are passed on to the higher levels of government for approval. The smaller size of *Gram Sansads* leads to more meaningful participation than in *Gram Sabha*. According to the law, however, all topics meant to be discussed in *Gram Sansad* can also be discussed in *Gram Sabha*.

Given that *Gram Sansad* meetings are more important than *Gram Sabha* meetings in actual practice, it is appropriate to assess the deliberation dimension of accountability mainly in terms of the functioning of *Gram Sansad* meetings. However, given the special role of *Gram Sabha* meetings in endorsing the annual budget and action plan of the GP, aspects of the functioning of *Gram Sabha* meetings have been included in the assessment of deliberation under one indicator ‘Extent of scrutiny of GP functioning.’ The actual functioning of *Gram Sansad* (and where applicable, *Gram Sabha*) meetings in the two GPs is evaluated below with respect to indicators for the deliberation dimension of accountability (already stated in Chapter 3). Table 5 summarizes the comparative situation in the two GPs with respect to these indicators, while the following paragraphs provide a detailed account of the comparison.

Table 5: The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of *Gram Sansad* and *Gram Sabha* in the West Bengal GPs

Indicator	Gram Panchayat	
	Debipur GP	Nowdapanur GP
Frequency of <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings	Both mandated meetings held in all constituencies.	Both mandated meetings held in all constituencies.
Extent of attendance in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings	One constituency did not achieve quorum in the half-yearly meeting. Six constituencies did not achieve quorum in annual meeting.	All constituencies, for which records are available, achieved quorum in annual and half-yearly meetings. Considering interview responses, only one constituency in this GP fails to achieve quorum.
	Average overall attendance of 11.31%.	Average overall attendance of 13.08%.
Inclusiveness of attendance in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings	Non-partisan people and people not belonging to ruling political party hardly attend.	Non-partisan people attend.
	Intermediate body (GUS) prepares proposal list which is ratified in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings. Proposals made by villager attendees are added to the list during the <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings.	Intermediate body (GUS) prepares proposal list which is ratified in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings. Proposals made by villager attendees are added to the list during the <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings.
Inclusiveness of decision making of <i>Gram Sansad</i>	GUS, in its list, includes proposals collected from neighbourhood meetings.	GUS rarely makes use of neighbourhood meetings in preparing its list.
	Lower inclusiveness of expression in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings (where additional proposals are collected), because non-partisan or opposition-affiliated persons hardly attend, let alone speak.	Higher inclusiveness of expression in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings (where additional proposals are collected), in terms of higher demand expression by non-partisan attendees.
Extent of scrutiny of GP functioning in <i>Gram Sansad</i> and <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	GP records presented but popular scrutiny absent.	GP records presented. Drawing of attention to GP shortcomings seen in <i>Gram Sansad</i> meetings of opposition constituencies.
	Questioning of GP members about individual problems.	Questioning of GP members about individual problems.

Source: Data obtained from GP records (2008-09 figures), elected representative interviews, villager survey interviews and direct observation.

The data on *Gram Sansad* meetings held, their extent of attendance, and the minutes of their proceedings (for the financial year 2008-09) was obtained from records of the two GPs. Other insights used for evaluating the different indicators were obtained from

villager survey and elected representative interviews and direct observation by the author.

Frequency of Gram Sansad Meetings

In Debipur GP, data obtained from the GP office shows that the mandated half-yearly and annual *Gram Sansad* meetings were held in all constituencies in 2008-09, though postponed sessions were held in some constituencies because of lack of quorum. In Nowdapanur GP, half yearly and annual *Gram Sansad* sessions in 2008-09 were held in all the constituencies for which data was available, and quorum was attained in all sessions.

Extent of Attendance in Gram Sansad meetings

Nowdapanur GP had overall higher *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance than Debipur GP in 2008-09, in terms of its attainment of quorum in a higher proportion of constituencies, and its higher overall people's attendance. For Nowdapanur GP, attendance records were available for five out of twelve constituencies. None of these five constituencies in Nowdapanur GP had to postpone sessions because of lack of quorum, either for the half-yearly or the annual sessions. In Debipur GP, all but one of the 17 constituencies were able to obtain the quorum in the half yearly *Gram Sansad* meeting of 2008-09. Only one constituency was not able to achieve a quorum of 10%, and therefore had to hold a postponed half yearly meeting. The Annual *Gram Sansad* in Debipur GP for 2008-09 saw postponed sessions in as many as six constituencies. Out of the six constituencies of Debipur GP that held postponed annual meetings, four were able to achieve the required 5% quorum.

Table 6 shows the overall attendance achieved in the annual and half-yearly *Gram Sansad* sessions held in the two GPs, and also the highest and lowest attendance figures among all their constituencies. Considering the overall attendance of both the half-yearly and annual sessions, Debipur GP had an average overall attendance of 11.31% for 2008-09 (see Table 5). Nowdapanur GP shows a slightly higher overall attendance for its *Gram Sansad* meetings than Debipur GP for both the half-yearly and annual sessions (see Table 6), and also a higher average overall attendance of 13.08% (see Table 5).

Table 6: Attendance in Half-yearly and Annual *Gram Sansad* Meetings (2008-09)

Session	Attendance in Debipur GP (%)			Attendance in Nowdapanur GP (%)		
	Overall	Highest	Lowest	Overall	Highest	Lowest
Half Yearly	10.75	13.41	4.71	12.73	21.92	10.16
Annual	11.88	27.68	3.98	13.44	26.02	11.24

Source: Data obtained from GP records

One methodological weakness in the arriving of inferences on *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance in Nowdapanur GP is that the inferences are made on the basis of records available for only five out of its twelve constituencies. Interviews with some elected representatives of the GP however revealed that quorum in *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance is generally attained in all the constituencies of the GP, with the exception of one constituency named Soluadanga.³¹ The two GP members representing Soluadanga confirmed that the attendance in the meetings in their constituency is very low. One of the villager survey respondents from Soluadanga who is a member of the

³¹The interviewed representatives who provided details about *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance are the *Upa-pradhan* (deputy chairperson), the head of the Infrastructure committee, the head of the Education and Public Health committee, and three opposition members (two representing Soluadanga constituency and one representing Bejpara constituency). Attendance records for Soluadanga were not available in the GP office at the time of fieldwork.

INC and highly educated, also confirmed the low attendance and failure to reach quorum there. The evidence obtained from these interviews indicates that even if the attendance of all constituencies of Nowdapanur GP was to be considered, its overall attendance would still be higher than that of Debipur GP (given that there is evidence of only one of its constituencies failing to achieve quorum, compared to as many as six in Debipur GP).

The inferences about GP attendance stated above are mainly based on the attendance records maintained by the GP offices. Because of reliability concerns that are often harboured about government documents, especially GP records, it is prudent to refer to interview data (in addition to data from records) to obtain a clearer idea about *Gram Sansad* meeting participation. In Nowdapanur GP, which has poorer record keeping than Debipur GP, the elected representatives interviewed gave an estimate of *Gram Sansad* attendance in their respective constituencies that matched with the records. Data from the villager survey interviews also serve as a means to verify the reliability of the information obtained from the GP's attendance records. The interview data from the villager survey confirms whether *Gram Sansad* meetings are indeed actually being held regularly in the constituencies in which the respondents reside, and sheds qualitative insights on the inclusiveness of *Gram Sansad* meeting participation. These insights are as valuable as numerical attendance figures in assessing the functioning of *Gram Sansad* meetings as a deliberative forum. In Debipur GP, three persons among the sixteen villager survey respondents had ever attended *Gram Sansad* meetings, while in Nowdapanur GP eight out of the sixteen respondents had done the same.³²

³²50% attendance among the survey respondents does not mean that 50% villagers attend *Gram Sansad* meetings in Nowdapanur GP. Attendance in the meetings is higher than in Debipur GP, but it is not as high as 50%. Because of sampling limitations, the extent of attendance among the respondents does not

Inclusiveness of Attendance in Gram Sansad Meetings

The inclusiveness of attendance is as important as the extent of attendance as a criterion to assess the functioning of *Gram Sansad* meetings as a deliberative mechanism. The exclusion of any significant section of a GP's population from *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance would mean that the inclusiveness of *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance in that GP is low. In Debipur GP, all three respondents among the sixteen villager survey respondents who attended *Gram Sansad* meetings are members of the ruling party CPI(M), while none of the non-partisan respondents (i.e. respondents who not members of any party) ever attended *Gram Sansad* meetings. Some non-partisan non-attendees in Debipur GP expressed being put off by the perception of ruling party control expressed in *Gram Sansad* meetings in this heavily CPI (M) dominated GP; one such non-attendee in this GP commented that "*Gram Sansad* meetings have become like party meetings" (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent living in the ruling party-controlled Debipur-Chhotodhamas constituency of Debipur GP, dated 12/09/2009). The Self Evaluation Exercise Report prepared by Debipur GP for 2007-08 admits that the reason for the low attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings in the GP is that "people holding divergent views do not feel interested to attend the meetings." Such evidence shows that CPI (M) domination repels non-partisan people or people affiliated to opposition political parties from attending *Gram Sansad* meetings in Debipur GP.

In Nowdapanur GP, unlike Debipur GP, all the *Gram Sansad* meeting attendees among the villager survey respondents are not political party members: three of the eight attendees among its villager survey respondents are political party members,

reflect the actual extent of attendance among the whole GP population. Please see Chapter 3 for the details and strengths and limitations of the quota sampling method applied in this study.

while the remaining are non-partisan. In Nowdapanur GP which has a more competitive political scenario, we at least see non-partisan people attending among the villager survey respondents. Politicization affecting *Gram Sansad* meetings does not augur well for establishing popular voice in a wide and inclusive sense through the medium of these meetings, and seems to be much more malignant in the case of the GP with the less competitive political scenario, Debipur GP.

From the above account, one observes a positive association between levels of electoral competition and attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings: the GP with higher electoral competition has higher and more inclusive GP attendance. Even within Debipur GP, which is heavily dominated by one party, it is an opposition constituency—Mobarokpur—that shows the highest average *Gram Sansad* attendance in 2008-09. Mobarokpur is controlled by the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), and is an island in this GP permeated by the ocean of CPI (M) dominance.³³ The residents of Mobarokpur therefore possibly perceive some degree of space for participation free from hegemonic ruling party control.

Unlike Debipur GP, opposition controlled constituency areas in Nowdapanur GP--Bejpara and Sundipur East--do not show the highest attendance. Sripurdanga (a constituency controlled by the ruling INC) had the highest attendance in both the half yearly and annual *Gram Sansad* sessions in Nowdapanur GP. However it might be noted that politics on the whole (even in ruling party constituencies) is very competitive in Nowdapanur GP. Debipur GP, on the other hand, has an overwhelming dominance of

³³Mobarokpur is a two member constituency and both its GP representatives are from the AITC. Both the members told the author that they encouraged the people of their area to attend these meetings and talk about their problems and grievances in these meetings as a matter of right. One member also stated that compared to the earlier term when this constituency was controlled by the ruling CPI (M), people now feel more free to attend the meetings and talk about their problems (Author's field interviews with the two GP members representing Mobarokpur constituency, dated 17/09/2009 and 8/10/2009).

the CPI (M), with the opposition constituencies offering greater relative space for inclusive participation.

Inclusiveness of Decision Making by Gram Sansad

The inclusiveness of the decision making process in *Gram Sansad* meetings should also be assessed as a basis for judging the effectiveness of *Gram Sansad* as a deliberative mechanism in actual practice. As already seen, West Bengal's *Panchayat* law states that *Gram Sansad* has the power to identify beneficiaries and suggest specific development works. In actual reality however, the *Gram Sansad* meeting attendees are not the sole source of proposals for identifying beneficiaries and suggesting development works. The reality in both Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP is that an intermediate organization named the *Gram Unnayan Samiti* (GUS) or Village Development Committee plays an important role in preparing the list of proposals. This list of proposals is approved in *Gram Sansad* meetings and considered to be the decision of the *Gram Sansad*.

The GUS is a body that exists at the level of every *Gram Sansad* area or electoral constituency, and may be considered to be the executive committee of the *Gram Sansad* (Government of West Bengal 2008a). The GP member representing the constituency, a member of the opposition political party of the constituency, nominees of Self-Help Groups and community-based or voluntary organizations, and a government employee and school teacher residing in the constituency area are all members of GUS, in addition to persons elected in *Gram Sansad* meetings to serve as members of GUS.³⁴

³⁴The number of elected members in GUS is either 10 or one tenth of the total number of voters of the *Gram Sansad*, whichever is higher (Government of West Bengal 2008a).

In both GPs, the list of proposals is actually prepared by the GUS, and it is approved in *Gram Sansad* meetings. In Debipur GP, GP members are asked by the *Pradhan*, during the general body meeting of the GP, to convene GUS meetings in order to prepare the list of beneficiary and work proposals for their respective constituencies.³⁵ Additional proposals are however added by the villager attendees during the *Gram Sansad* meetings. The minutes of the *Gram Sansad* meetings for Debipur GP show individual named requests for benefits and infrastructural works made during the meetings. In Nowdapanur GP too, the priority list of demands is actually made by the GUS, and is approved in *Gram Sansad* meetings where additional proposals are added by the present villagers in the meetings (Author's telephonic interview with the Head of the Education and Public Health Committee of Nowdapanur GP, dated 10/02/2010). The villager survey respondents in both GPs also recollected the specific requests made by them in *Gram Sansad* meetings. A male attendee in Debipur GP (who is a CPI (M) member), for instance, had demanded a tap for his locality. A female, non-partisan attendee in Nowdapanur GP had spoken of her misery because of a lack of place to stay and requested *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY) assistance for herself³⁶ (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009), while another non-partisan female attendee of this GP, who heads a Self-Help Group, requested financial assistance for the productive activities of the group (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010).

What are the implications of the GUS playing an important role in the decision making process of *Gram Sansad*? The GUS is a highly politicized organization, and it is natural that political considerations (especially of the ruling party in the concerned

³⁵As stated in the minutes of the GP general body meetings for Debipur GP for 2008-09.

³⁶*Indira Awas Yojana* is a central government programme for providing financial assistance to deserving beneficiaries for constructing their own houses.

constituency) will significantly influence the way it chooses proposals. As a result there can be no guarantee that the proposals prepared by GUS are actually reflective of genuine popular need or demand. On the other hand, GUS role in preparing the proposal list may also promote inclusiveness of expression to a certain extent. An INC member of Nowdapanur GP opined that because of opposition party representation in GUS, the opposition can influence the preparation of the proposal list. In the absence of GUS, he said that the ruling party of the GP would have a free hand in preparing the lists, and the resulting lists ratified in the *Gram Sansad* meetings would be arbitrary and less inclusive. The ideal situation would be one where demands made by the people themselves (and not by intermediaries) would make up the proposal lists. However, the use of GUS to formulate proposal lists is preferable at least to a situation where the *Pradhan* or the ruling party GP members are the dominant authors of the proposal lists.

In Debipur GP, the various GUSs incorporate in their lists proposals collected from the lay residents of their respective constituencies in *para baithaks* or neighbourhood meetings. Holding *para baithaks* in this GP is an established practice, and these meetings are held frequently (monthly or twice a month) in the constituencies of Debipur GP. The villager survey findings for Debipur GP show that even non-partisan persons attend them and speak about their needs in them. In Nowdapanur GP, *para baithaks* are not yet an established practice and are rarely held, though the GUS secretary of one constituency stated that such meetings are sometimes conducted in his *Gram Sansad* area. None of the villager survey respondents of Nowdapanur GP had ever attended *para baithaks*.

It is problematic to come to a judgment about which GP has more inclusive decision making in its *Gram Sansad* meetings since the evidence in this respect is conflicting. In Debipur GP, we find that participatory neighbourhood meetings are one

(but not the sole) source of proposals for the GUS lists that are ratified in the *Gram Sansad* meetings, while the actual attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings where proposals from villager attendees are added is lower and less inclusive. In Nowdapanur GP, we see the near absence of *para baithaks* but we do see higher attendance and more inclusive attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings which are an additional source of proposals. The collecting of additional proposals during *Gram Sansad* meetings in Nowdapanur GP (where non-partisan persons also attend) serves to ameliorate the inclusiveness defects that arise from the non-use of *para baithaks* in formulating the GUS list of proposals. The evidence from the villager survey interviews shows that non-partisan people not only attend, but also freely express their demands in *Gram Sansad* meetings in Nowdapanur GP, unlike the apparent situation of *Gram Sansad* meetings in Debipur GP. Given such conflicting evidence, no conclusive assessment can be made as to which GP, Debipur or Nowdapanur, has more inclusive decision making in *Gram Sansad* meetings. Nowdapanur GP, however, clearly has more inclusive expression of popular demands in its *Gram Sansad* meetings because of the higher extent of attendance and speaking by attendees not belonging to the ruling party.

Extent of Scrutiny of GP Functioning by Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha

The law vests in *Gram Sansad* meetings the power to discuss and ratify important records of the GP such as the budget, income expenditure report and annual action plan, thus making it possible for the *Gram Sansad* and *Gram Sabha* attendees to discuss, comment on and criticize important aspects of the GP's proposed and actual courses of action. A perusal of the minutes of the *Gram Sansad* meetings in both the selected GPs showed that records such as income expenditure report, budget and supplementary budget, last audit report and annual action plans were presented in *Gram Sansad*

meetings. However the actual level of popular scrutiny and discussion seems to be low. The minutes of the annual *Gram Sansad* meeting for 2008-09 in Debipur-Chhalalpur constituency of Debipur GP, where these records were presented, stated, “Since nobody among the present voters participated in the discussion on the stated topics, the *Sabhapati* (person presiding over the meeting) announced the session as closed at the end of his comments.”

There is more indicative evidence (obtained from the author’s own observation of a *Gram Sabha* meeting in Debipur GP in December 2009) on the lack of popular scrutiny and inputs on the records presented for ratification in Debipur GP. The author observed the presentation of the budget for 2010-11 by a *Sahayak* (administrative assistant) of the GP. A lot of English terms were used but there was just reading of the budget with no explanation at all. The *Sahayak* presented the request for approval of budget, and the attending voters were asked if they had any suggestions to make. No inputs came from the public and a show of hands (without actual counting) was taken as a sign of approval. It should be noted that this show of hands was conducted in an atmosphere of darkness and poor visibility. The same ratification procedure was adopted with respect to the annual action plan of the GP. The evidence shows that the role of the *Gram Sansad* and *Gram Sabha* meetings of Debipur GP in examining and deliberating on GP records is passive.

In contrast, there is evidence of an active *Gram Sansad* role in certain constituencies of Nowdapanur GP in scrutinizing and commenting on GP records. The minutes registers of the annual *Gram Sansad* meeting held in two constituencies in Nowdapanur GP showed an interesting detail: Soluadanga *Gram Sansad* and Bejpara *Gram Sansad* demanded in the resolutions of their annual meetings that proposals adopted in their previous *Gram Sansad* meetings but not given place in the annual plan

of the GP till then, have to be accommodated by the GP in the annual plan for the upcoming year. From this it appears that the ruling party (possibly driven by political motivations) has omitted to include in the GP's annual plan proposals suggested by the *Gram Sansads* of constituencies not controlled by it. Furthermore, it is apparent that that the GP and GUS members belonging to the non-ruling political parties use the *Gram Sansad* meetings to highlight the shortcomings of the ruling party, and *Gram Sansad* meeting resolutions as a medium to pressurize the ruling party of the GP.

The account in the previous paragraph affirms that the *Gram Sansad* is a politicized forum; political considerations mediate the drawing of attention to work not done by the GP.³⁷ Yet the positive aspect of this is that the *Gram Sansad* resolutions in opposition areas of Nowdapanur GP are drawing attention to work not done, and compared to Debipur GP, *Gram Sansads* in Nowdapanur GP are playing a more active (albeit politically motivated) role in examining and commenting on GP records. The minutes of the annual *Gram Sansad* meetings of the constituencies controlled by the ruling party of Nowdapanur GP only stated that the records were presented, and did not mention anything about the discussion or people's comments about these records.

While the extent of popular discussion and scrutiny of GP records is often low, villagers do use the medium of *Gram Sansad* meetings to discuss and scrutinize the functioning of the GP in other ways. *Gram Sansad* meetings provide an opportunity to the villagers to publicly question elected representatives about non-fulfilment of promises, non-availability or breakdown of infrastructural assets such as tube-wells or roads, or failure or delay in extending promised benefits of welfare programmes. The author learnt from elected representatives in both GPs that people ask a lot of questions

³⁷As per the provisions of the West Bengal *Panchayat Act*, the *Pradhan* is required to preside over all *Gram Sansad* meetings. Yet it was seen in the meeting minutes of Debipur GP that the *Pradhan* presided over the *Gram Sansad* meetings of the constituencies controlled by the ruling party, while the opposition area *Gram Sansad* meetings were presided by the representing GP member. This is further evidence of the politicization of *Gram Sansad* meetings.

in the *Gram Sansad* meetings. However questions raised and complaints made, are usually about individual problems such as why the attendee is not getting a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card while his neighbour is, or why there is a delay in arrival of pension money.

Overall Effectiveness of Deliberative Mechanisms

On the basis of the comparative situation in both GPs according to all the indicators, Nowdapanur GP is inferred as having higher effectiveness of its deliberative mechanisms in actual practice. Nowdapanur GP therefore does better than Debipur GP on the deliberation dimension of accountability. The evidence of higher attendance (higher overall attendance and attainment of quorum in a higher proportion of constituencies), clearly more inclusive attendance, and a relatively more active role in scrutiny of GP records point to Nowdapanur GP's superiority in this respect. There is no variation between the two GPs seen with respect to frequency of meetings, and the evidence on the remaining indicator of inclusiveness of decision making does not show the clear superiority of one GP over the other.

Gram Sansad Meetings : True Forums of Deliberative Democracy?

As seen in the above account, Nowdapanur GP was ahead of Debipur GP in terms of the effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism, mainly due to its higher and more inclusive meeting attendance. Deliberation, as it is taking place in both the West Bengal GPs, however, merely refers to expression of personal demands. The *Gram Sansad* is simply a proposal collecting or demand identification forum as far as its actual functioning is concerned. This role is not trivial or insignificant; it results in the needs of poor, deprived persons being expressed and finding their way into the GP's action plan

or work agenda, and is thus creating a degree of accountability or popular control. However, it must be recognized that there are deficiencies in the functioning of *Gram Sansad* in both GPs, which hinder the establishment of deliberative democracy in the true sense. In the absence of true deliberative democracy, true accountability or popular control also remains to be fully realized. It is pertinent to turn to the criteria of Cohen's ideal deliberative procedure (Cohen 1997) described in Chapter 2 of this thesis, to gauge the degree to which *Gram Sansad* meetings are able to realize the ideals of deliberative democracy.

An element of the ideal deliberative procedure is that participants themselves must decide on the agenda for meetings. However, in the actual functioning of the *Gram Sansad* meetings in West Bengal GPs, the agenda of each meeting is pre-decided; agenda items are fixed in accordance with the law, with additional items added by the GP and higher tiers of government. The very fact of an imposed agenda hinders the establishment of true deliberative democracy.

Rational debate i.e. proposing of alternative solutions by participants and reasons to back the proposed solutions is an essential element of ideal deliberative procedure. However such rational debate is not seen in the actual functioning of the *Gram Sansad* meetings in both GPs. The actual functioning of the *Gram Sansad* shows that it is a forum for making demands, rather than for carrying out rational debate of alternative solutions to village problems. The minutes of the *Gram Sansad* meetings in both GPs show that the demands made by attendees are mostly very personal in nature, either for proposing names of themselves or family members as beneficiaries, or for asking for amenities and infrastructure in their neighbourhood. The Secretary of Nowdapanur GP pointed to a reduction of people's interest in attending *Gram Sansad* meetings due to recent changes in the beneficiary selection rules of central government

programmes such as the housing programme Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS). The beneficiaries are now selected on the basis of their score on the BPL (Below Poverty Line) criteria specified by the government, and not on the basis of *Gram Sansad* demands. The Secretary added that topics like road construction, which yield general rather than individual benefits, are now the main focus of *Gram Sansad* discussions, as a result of which there is no real interest among the people to attend the meetings (Author's field interview, dated 18/12/2009).

A positive aspect of these meetings is that most attendees perceive that they have freedom to speak and express themselves in these meetings, which fulfills Cohen's criteria of procedural equality of participants to some degree. All three attendees among the survey respondents in Debipur GP believed that there was freedom of speech in the *Gram Sansad* meetings, stating that anyone who wishes to speak may freely speak in them. Five out of the eight attendees among the villager survey respondents in Nowdapanur GP, believed that there was freedom of speech in the meetings.³⁸ In Debipur GP, two out of the three attendees among the villager survey respondents have ever spoken in *Gram Sansad* meetings, while one has not. In Nowdapanur GP, three out of the eight attendees could recall ever having spoken in *Gram Sansad* meetings. The criteria of substantive equality is fulfilled to the degree that there is no barrier to attendance by poor people, and poor people freely attend the meetings. In fact the survey responses show that affluent people mostly do not attend these meetings.

On the flip side, substantive equality is constrained by the fact that organizational affiliation and political party affiliation mediate people's attendance and

³⁸ The three attendees who did not express a belief in freedom of speech did not have any clear opinion on whether there is such freedom. They however, did not mention any external constraints. They made comments such as lack of recollection of meeting proceedings, personally not having anything to say, and only Self-Help Group (SHG) leaders (and not ordinary SHG members) having something to say.

expression in *Gram Sansad* meetings to an extent. All three respondents who attended the meetings in Debipur GP are CPI (M) members, and one of these three attendees is both an SHG (Self-Help Group) member³⁹ and party member. In Nowdapanur GP, unlike Debipur GP, all the attendees are not party members; three of the eight attendees are party members. One attendee is both an SHG member and party member. There are three SHG members among the eight attendees in Nowdapanur GP, and all the three SHG members profess attending by virtue of belonging to or leading SHGs.

The survey responses in both GPs show that persons holding leadership positions in their local political party organization or in their SHGs often speak not just to forward personal demands but to forward demands on behalf of the members of the organization they represent. One female attendee in Debipur GP, who heads a local women's committee of the CPI (M), stated that she speaks very frequently and conveys demands of the women's committee (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 8/09/2009). In Nowdapanur GP, one female attendee who is an SHG leader stated that she makes demands for economic assistance on behalf of SHGs (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010) while one highly educated and well-to-do male attendee of Nowdapanur GP, who is a local INC leader, stated that he makes demands on behalf of poor people of his village (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 05/01/2010). Other attendees, it seems from the survey responses, speak rarely, and even if they do, speak to make personal demands such as for IAY money or construction of a tap near their house. A female attendee in Debipur GP said that she made a proposal for construction of tap near house and threatened to stop voting in

³⁹ Self Help Groups (SHGs) are groups of 10-20 villagers, especially women in a neighbourhood who organize themselves into a group for the pursuit of livelihood activities (Government of West Bengal 2009b)

elections if the tap was not provided (and the tap was finally given) (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 17/09/2009). A female attendee in Nowdapanur GP spoke of her misery because of a lack of place to stay and requested an IAY house for herself (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009).

Substantive equality also demands that the outcomes of deliberation should not be influenced by factors such as wealth or power; this condition is not entirely satisfied in *Gram Sansad* meetings in both GPs. As already seen in the assessment of inclusiveness of *Gram Sansad* decision making, proposal lists prepared by intermediary bodies such as GUS (which are significantly influenced by political preferences) are a significant component of *Gram Sansad* decisions. Power does therefore influence the outcomes of deliberation. The ideal situation would have been one of villager attendees of such meetings preparing the entire proposal list through free discussion and reasoned debate.

Cohen gives importance to the use of proper decision making procedures such as true consensus or suitable voting for arriving at fair decisions in deliberative forums. Individual proposal collecting, which is a major function of these meetings, does not require any collective decision making techniques. While subjecting action plans, budgets and other records to ratification by *Gram Sansad* or *Gram Sabha* meeting attendees, there is no proper decision making procedure or systematic voting used. As already seen, a vague show of hands is treated as sign of assent or approval in the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Debipur GP, and the level of people's discussion, scrutiny and input in the ratification of records by deliberative forums is low in both GPs.

Another issue that constraints the establishment of true deliberative democracy is the politicization of *Gram Sansad* meetings. As already seen, political factors influence these meetings in various ways; they influence who attends and who does not, they influence scrutiny and criticism expressed in *Gram Sansad* meetings, and they also influence who presides over the meetings. It cannot be denied that political party influence is injecting a degree of dynamism, vitality and energy into *Gram Sansad* meetings: this is evident, for instance, in the utilization of *Gram Sansad* meetings in opposition constituencies of Nowdapanur GP for expressing criticism of the GP's ruling party. However, these meetings will never be truly inclusive meetings "of the people, for the people, by the people" and true forums of deliberative democracy unless they shake off such political influences.

The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability

'Social Audit' broadly refers to audit or monitoring/evaluation activities conducted by the people themselves. It can be contrasted with audit which is conducted by auditors from higher levels of government. Social Audit not only aims to detect financial irregularities and breach of rules, but also aims to assess if implementation activities of the local government are in accordance with the felt needs of the people (Matthew 2007b; Government of West Bengal 2008b), and to expose complaints and grievances that people affected by such implementation activities might have. At the time of this study, the NREGA was the only programme being implemented by West Bengal GPs that provided for Social Audit in its rules. Therefore the NREGA Social Audit is the only institutionalized and systematic popular evaluation exercise in operation in West Bengal GPs.

The Government of West Bengal's NREGA Guidelines (Government of West Bengal 2008b) and its other directives identify the GUS and the Social Audit Team as the bodies meant to carry out Social Audit. A Social Audit Team is required to be constituted in each GP to co-ordinate the overall task of NREGA Social Audit and work along with the GUS in conducting Social Audit. The Social Audit Team of the GP is to be constituted in a special session of the *Gram Sabha*. Apart from one GP staff member and one GP elected representative of the opposition party, it is supposed to have eleven other members. GUS, Self-Help Group and NGO representatives, and current or retired teachers and government employees residing in the GP are supposed to be members of the Social Audit team. According to the Social Audit rules, every constituency in the GP should be covered under Social Audit at least once a year, and depending on the number of constituencies in the GP, the Social Audit Team may study one or more than one constituency every month (Government of West Bengal 2008b).

The Social Audit Team, in its attempt to uncover existing discrepancies, shortcomings and irregularities, is required to undertake the following major tasks in the Social Audit process: (a) examination of Muster roll (attendance record of workers) and other NREGA records (b) visiting at least two NREGA work sites in each constituency, and carrying out of observation and discussion with workers (Government of West Bengal 2008b). Additionally, the GUS is required to interview five NREGA beneficiaries in the concerned constituency. The findings of the Social Audit Team are required to be submitted to a public meeting of villagers known as the 'Social Audit *Sabha* (meeting)'. In this public meeting to be held in each constituency, the Social Audit Team is supposed to read out its findings in the presence of GP representatives and various bureaucratic officials belonging to higher tiers. The Social Audit Team should make modifications, if required, to its Social Audit report

considering the inputs generated in the Social Audit *Sabha*. The final Social Audit report, thus prepared, is to be submitted to the GP (Government of West Bengal 2008b).

The GP is required to take action with respect to the issues and grievances exposed within seven days of the Social Audit, and report the result to the Social audit Team, and also the block level programme officer of NREGA. The block level programme officer, a bureaucratic functionary, is also held responsible for ensuring that corrective action is taken on issues and grievances arising out of Social Audit (Government of West Bengal 2008b). There is no mention in the rules of any provision for punitive action to be taken in case of non-redress of issues and grievances arising out of the Social Audit exercise. The actual operation of Social Audit in the two chosen GPs is examined below, with respect to the indicators developed in Chapter 3. Table 7 summarizes the actual situation with respect to the various indicators for both GPs.

Frequency of Social Audit

Staff members of both Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP mentioned that Social Audits have been conducted in their GPs. The available data for Debipur GP (obtained from the NREGA website) shows the date of the earliest Social Audit as 23/7/09. The data obtained from the NREGA website shows that six Social Audits were done in this GP in 2009-10 (Government of India 2009-10a).⁴⁰ The NREGA website showed that some other GPs in Memari –I block (to which Debipur GP belongs) had conducted a higher number of Social Audits, with Amadpur GP and Daluibazar-I GP having conducted eleven Social Audits each and Nimo-I GP having conducted fourteen.

⁴⁰While the figures for the other accountability mechanisms such as *Gram Sansad* meetings and elections were collected for 2008-09, the Social Audit figures were collected for 2009-10 because Social Audits in West Bengal were not conducted before 2009-10. The dates on which Social Audits were conducted in Debipur GP are 23/7/09, 24/7/09, 28/7/09, 30/7/09, 4/8/09, 6/8/09 (Government of India 2009-10a).

For Nowdapanur GP, the data obtained from the NREGA website showed that only one Social Audit was conducted in this GP in 2009-10, on 1/8/2009. In fact all the GPs of Berhampore block, and even Murshidabad district (to which Nowdapanur GP belongs), had conducted only one Social Audit each in 2009-10 (Government of India 2009-10a). The much higher number of Social Audits conducted in the GPs of Memari-I block and Burdwan district, compared to the GPs of Berhampore block and Murshidabad district, possibly indicates the greater pressure of the higher tiers on GPs for conducting Social Audit.

Table 7: The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of Social Audit in the West Bengal GPs (2009-10)

Indicator	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	
	Debipur GP	Nowdapanur GP
Frequency	Six Social Audits conducted. Conducted by Social Audit Team and GP staff members.	One Social Audit conducted. Conducted by Social Audit Team and GP staff members.
Extent of popular involvement	No convening of public assembly to discuss Social Audit findings.	No convening of public assembly to discuss Social Audit findings.
Raising of issues and exposure of grievances	No record of issues or grievances.	No record of issues or grievances.
Perceived effectiveness (according to GP staff and elected members)	Social Audit conducted in more serious manner. Positive perception, seen as exposing shortcomings.	Social Audit conducted in less serious manner. Procedural irregularities seen. Not seen as having an impact or revealing shortcomings because of its superficial, non-serious nature.

Source: Data obtained from Social Audit pages of NREGA website (Government of India 2009-10a) and interviews with GP elected members and staff

Extent of Popular Involvement in Social Audit

The representation of civil society interests and educated persons such as teachers and government officials in the Social Audit Team, which conducts Social Audits, appears to be advantageous for an independent scrutiny of the GP's NREGA implementation. However it is desirable that the mass of lay village residents, who are the actual beneficiaries of NREGA, should also be involved in some way in the Social Audit process. In both GPs, Social Audit in its actual functioning is more of a top-down exercise, lacking widespread popular involvement.

The author learnt from the staff members in both the GPs that the Social Audit Team members, together with the GP staff members, prepare the Social Audit report. Till the time of fieldwork, the findings of Social Audit had not yet been presented in specially convened public meetings or even in the *Gram Sansad* or *Gram Sabha* meetings in both GPs. The degree of popular input in preparing the Social Audit report is very meagre, and is from the interview responses of five NREGA beneficiaries elicited by the Social Audit team, and conversation of the team members with a few workers at the NREGA worksites.

Raising of Issues and Exposure of Grievances

Social Audit may be said to be functioning as an effective monitoring mechanism if it is able to expose irregularities, people's grievances or any other shortcoming in implementation. In reality, however, there was no available mention of the issues raised or grievances revealed through Social Audit in the two GPs, either in the records of the two GPs or on the NREGA website.

Perceived Effectiveness of Social Audit

Contrary to the lack of mention of issues and grievances raised by Social Audit in the records, the Executive Assistant (the highest ranked staff member) of Debipur GP claimed that Social Audit was leading to faults and shortcomings in the NREGA implementation process becoming visible. Such information, he felt, was benefitting the GP in its NREGA implementation work (Author's field interview, dated 29/12/2009). The *Pradhan* of this GP, too, expressed a belief in the effectiveness of Social Audit in checking corruption in NREGA implementation (Author's field interview, dated 14/09/2009).

The Executive Assistant of Debipur GP revealed that the district administration of Burdwan district was pressurizing the GPs of the district to properly conduct Social Audit, and future allocation of NREGA funds by the district and block to the GPs could be refused in case of the GPs' failure to conduct Social Audit. Therefore, the conduct of Social Audit was treated with seriousness in Debipur GP (Author's field interview with Executive Assistant of Debipur GP, dated 29/12/2009). In contrast, the Executive Assistant of Nowdapanur GP felt that Social Audit in his GP was being done in a superficial, non-serious way and was not playing any role in exposing shortcomings or grievances (Author's field interview, dated 17/12/2009). An elected member of Nowdapanur GP, belonging to the ruling INC disclosed that the actual conduct of Social Audit in his GP was marked by procedural irregularities such as forging of signatures of absent members of the Social Audit team. He commented that Social Audit is ineffective because of political interference and influence, and felt that it would

be more effective if higher level government officials were involved (Author's telephonic interview, dated 13/02/2010).⁴¹

Overall Effectiveness of Monitoring Mechanism

Compared to Nowdapanur GP, Debipur GP, like the other GPs of Burdwan district seems to be taking the task of Social Audit more seriously. The overall higher effectiveness of Social Audit in Debipur GP is evident from its higher regularity and its higher perceived effectiveness among staff and elected members. Debipur GP therefore is ahead of Nowdapanur GP on the monitoring dimension of accountability. Both GPs, however, suffer from a failure to involve the wider public in the Social Audit process and the lack of records on grievances exposed through Social Audit. The greater pro-active pressure from the higher tiers appears to be responsible for the relatively greater importance given to Social Audit in Debipur GP compared to Nowdapanur GP.

Popular Monitoring in the two GPs : More Insights

The institutionalized mechanism of Social Audit is nascent and top-down in reality; therefore there is a need for more insights on popular monitoring. Such insights can come from an understanding of monitoring actually carried out by the people outside the institutionalized forum of Social Audit. One simple and obvious way for people to monitor their representatives is to ask questions to them, whether in the formal forum of *Gram Sansad*, or through visits to the GP office, or even in informal settings. Four out of sixteen villager survey respondents in Debipur GP stated that they had asked questions to their GP representatives, while five out of sixteen in Nowdapanur GP had asked questions to their GP representatives. The questions are mostly related to

⁴¹The involvement of higher level government officials is naturally incongruous with the idea of Social Audit. However, this response shows a belief that monitoring carried out by the higher tiers of government is more effective than popular monitoring.

personal benefits (such as inclusion in BPL list, IAY allocation), and sometimes related to slightly broader concerns (like the condition of the road in the village, or the tubewell not working). Nevertheless, it is quite significant that in GPs, elected representatives are much more accessible and visible than representatives of higher levels of government; this prompts at least some people to contact their representatives and ask them questions with respect to their demands and problems.

The initiating of effective popular monitoring necessitates certain contextual conditions, both on the demand and supply sides. On the supply side, there is a need for the availability of information. The Right to Information act, which has been in operation since 2005, establishes the right of the villagers to view all public documents such as GP records. Yet it is questionable as to how many villagers would take the initiative to come to the GP office and ask to view GP records. Other means of making available information therefore have to be adopted.

GPs are required to make visible details pertaining to their implementation work through means such as notice boards outside the GP office, and the painting of important information on the outer walls of the GP office.⁴² This researcher observed the posting of information in bright yellow and black paint related to the latest position in NREGA implementation on the GP wall of Debipur GP, and also information about the rights of people with respect to various other schemes. The GP walls are a good way of giving readily-visible information to the people about the work being done by the GP. Debipur GP also circulates a booklet among its *Gram Sansad* annual session attendees giving details of the outputs, income, expenditure and miscellaneous details about the GP. Nowdapanur GP does not circulate such a booklet, the reason being (as this researcher was told by the GP Secretary) the lack of funds.

⁴²The West Bengal NREGA guidelines state that in accordance with the Right to Information Act 2005, the displaying of important NREGA work related information is also required on boards at the NREGA work-sites (Government of West Bengal 2008b).

The higher institutional capacity of Debipur GP enables it to bear the costs of adopting superior means of disseminating information among the village residents. Yet how much of the actual working of the GP people are able to understand even in this GP is questionable, even with all the available information. The fact remains that the GP continues to exercise a great deal of discretion in deciding the actual sequence of taking up of works for implementation, and the considerations that govern such decision making still remain mysterious (political considerations are probably significant in this respect). The desired level of transparency in the working of the GP is not yet forthcoming. The incomplete minutes registers of *Gram Sansad* meetings and meetings of GP committees seen by this researcher show that the record keeping practices of GPs still have a long way to go.

The demand side factors for monitoring are critical; even if information is made available, the absence of popular awareness and a desire on the part of the people to scrutinize the activities of their GP will mean that people will not realize the importance of monitoring or take the initiative to demand information and detect irregularities and shortcomings in the GP's functioning. The presence of a popular movement is critical to the success of popular monitoring. In the Indian state of Rajasthan we see the example of NGOs taking initiative to involve the village people in the popular monitoring process (Afridi 2008). In Debipur GP, this researcher did not find any indication of NGO role (the CPI (M) dominance here does not leave space for any autonomous civil society organizations). In Nowdapanur GP, there is an NGO called 'Sebabrata', but its role is purely developmental⁴³ rather than activist in any way. Given the poor development of civil society and the absence of activist NGOs, it would not be surprising if levels of popular monitoring were low in both GPs.

⁴³Sebabrata is involved in activities such as testing of drinking water for arsenic, training of village women in livelihood activities such as silk spinning, and education

To gauge the effectiveness of popular monitoring, the author asked the following question to the villager survey respondents: “Can people of this area keep a watch on their representatives?” This question yields insights on people’s perception of their ability to monitor their representatives. In the educationally and socio-economically more developed Debipur GP, six respondents, out of the sixteen survey respondents, said yes. Out of the two who felt that people here cannot keep watch, one respondent stated that people here can understand what is going on but cannot express themselves (Author’s field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 19/09/2009). This response seems more related to his perception about the absence of impact of monitoring than the absence of monitoring per se. The other respondent who felt that people could not keep a watch, felt that people in her GP lacked the information to monitor (Author’s field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 12/09/2009). There were five no opinion responses, and the remaining responses fell in the grey area between ‘yes’ and ‘no’: one respondent stated that she herself keeps watch (Author’s field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 8/09/2009). Another respondent stated that he had no opinion on the matter, but felt that people in general have opportunities to ask questions to their representatives (Author’s field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 13/09/2009). One subject commented that there had been improvement from before with respect to people’s ability to monitor (Author’s field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 13/09/2009). These gray area responses have a positive ring to them, and reflect that there is a degree of popular monitoring in this GP.

In the socio-economically more backward Nowdapanur GP, only one respondent respondent believes that people of the area can keep a watch on their representatives, compared to six in Debipur GP. This is somewhat surprising given the competitive political scenario of the GP and the higher average attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings. Three stated that the people could not keep watch, of whom one opined that since meetings of the GP are held in secrecy, one cannot keep watch (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 1/01/2010). Seven were clear no opinion responses. Other responses fell in the gray area between yes, no and no opinion: One subject said that he does not give any importance to the idea of keeping watch (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 1/01/2010). Another commented that he personally does not keep watch, and accepts whatever the GP does (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). Another respondent stated that "some can monitor, others cannot" (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010). Two subjects said that they themselves do not keep watch. Unlike the gray area responses in Debipur GP, these responses mostly have a negative slant and do not reflect positively on the extent of popular monitoring in Nowdapanur GP.

The reasons behind the differences in perceived levels of popular monitoring in the two GPs are complex and difficult to infer, since they are likely shaped by factors such as the respondents' own experience and their perception of others' experience and abilities, and also by factors such as the levels of education and awareness and information supply. Sampling limitations with respect to the villager survey also make it very problematic to arrive at any conclusive explanation. One possible explanation

behind the lower perceived levels of people's ability to monitor in Nowdapanur GP might be its higher levels of illiteracy and socio-economic backwardness compared to Debipur GP. The higher levels of illiteracy in Nowdapanur GP (perhaps resulting in lower overall consciousness and awareness) possibly explains the higher number of people who believe that the people here cannot keep watch, and the negative tone of people's opinions on popular monitoring. One subject in Nowdapanur, an illiterate SC lady living in a neighbourhood inhabited by SCs, in fact commented that people in her locality do not have the education that is required for monitoring (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). Debipur GP, which has higher levels of perceived ability of people to monitor, has higher literacy levels and relatively better information dissemination than Nowdapanur GP.

Among the complex factors that shape people's ability to monitor and their perception of it, two factors are therefore especially worth mentioning: the education level in the GP and the information made available by the GP. Respondents themselves make references to factors such as education, information and secrecy in their responses. While Debipur GP has relatively higher levels of people's perceived ability to monitor, it can be seen that in absolute terms, such levels are low in both GPs. Higher levels of education and awareness, conscientization of the people by civil society organizations and better information dissemination can possibly play a role in generating more active monitoring by the people in both GPs.

Indirect Accountability: Accountability of GP Staff

The three sections already seen in this chapter assess the functioning of mechanisms of accountability of elected representatives to the people (direct accountability). The GP,

however, consists not just of elected representatives, but also of staff members such as the *Nirbahi Sahayak* (Executive Assistant), *Sachib* (Secretary), *Nirman Sahayak* (Construction Assistant), *Sahayak* (administrative assistant) and GP *Karmee* (GP workers) who assist the GP members and the *Pradhan* in the GP's administrative tasks. This section evaluates the accountability of GP staff members to elected representatives, known as indirect accountability. Indirect accountability means the control of the GP's elected representatives on its staff members. It is operationalized in this study in terms of the effectiveness of the formal or institutionalized mechanisms of control of the elected representatives of the GP over GP staff members.

This section uses the 'sanctioning-monitoring-deliberation' scheme as a guide to evaluate accountability of GP staff members. The 'deliberation' dimension is however replaced by a 'decision making control' or 'administrative control' dimension that signifies the decision making powers of elected representatives vis a` vis the decision making powers of staff members. This dimension indicates whether staff members have decision making autonomy or have to abide by the decisions made by elected representatives. It is, therefore, a suitable indicator of control of elected representatives over staff members.

Sanctioning Dimension

The extent to which elected representatives have disciplinary control over GP staff members indicates the power of the former to sanction (punish) the latter. The GP's body of elected representatives has no power to award punishment to its staff members. Such power lies with two higher-level bureaucratic functionaries, namely the Block Development Officer or BDO, who is the Executive Officer of the *Panchayat Samiti* (Block level *Panchayat*) and the District Magistrate, who is the Executive Officer of the

Zilla Parishad (District level *Panchayat*) (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 36). It also has no power to pass resolutions for the recall of its most important staff members such as Executive Assistant, Secretary, *Nirman Sahayak* and *Sahayak*.

Since there is no available formal mechanism of sanctioning of staff members by elected representatives, formal sanctioning of staff members by elected representatives is non-existent in West Bengal GPs. There is therefore no variation between the chosen West Bengal GPs on the sanctioning dimension of indirect accountability.

Monitoring Dimension

The indicators of monitoring of staff members by elected representatives are the availability (and use) of institutionalized mechanisms for elected representatives to cross examine or monitor their staff, and whether elected representatives have the power to review performance of their staff through mechanisms such as writing performance reports. Apparently, there is a performance report of GP staff members known as the *Prakashya Karmanyata Pratibedan* (translated as non-confidential performance report) in which they are evaluated on the criteria of attendance, skill or expertise, and integrity. This report is prepared by the higher-level bureaucratic official known as *Panchayat Development officer* (PDO), who is the ex-officio Secretary of the *Panchayat Samiti*. This report is presented by the PDO to the Executive Officer of *Panchayat Samiti*. The GP *Pradhan* or other elected representatives have no contribution in the writing of the performance report (Author's field interview with Joint Secretary of *Panchayats* and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal, dated 10/08/2009).

The recent constitution of GP staff members into the Block and District *Panchayat* Cadres has opened up possibilities for their transfer to other GPs (within the same block or district) and promotion. This can be contrasted with the earlier situation when they were recruited locally and were supposed to remain in the same GP throughout their career. Their constitution into the cadres has introduced a measure of answerability for their performance, with the possibilities of promotion linked to their performance. Such answerability however is essentially to the upper tiers of the administrative structure, and not to the elected representatives of the GP.

The staff members of the GP and the *Pradhan* work closely together in the same office in executing the responsibilities of the GP, because of which there is ample opportunity for the latter to keep watch on the former. Yet, there is no institutionalized monitoring forum (such as an institutionalized periodic question-answer forum) available for the *Pradhan* and other GP elected members to question GP staff.⁴⁴ Due to the unavailability of insitutionalized monitoring mechanisms such as performance review or question answer forums, there is no variation between the chosen West Bengal GPs on the monitoring dimension of indirect accountability.

Decision Making Control

The West Bengal *Panchayat* law clearly states that the GP *Pradhan* shall exercise administrative control over GP staff (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 34). This means that GP staff members are obligated to follow and carry out the administrative orders of the *Pradhan*. The Executive Assistant of Nowdapanur GP told this author that he enjoyed no independent executive powers because of having to

⁴⁴At the block level, there is the mechanism known as Block *Sansad*. The Block *Sansad* consists of all elected members of all the GPs in the block and all *Panchayat Samiti* members (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 115A), and is a forum where the elected members may hold the block level bureaucracy answerable and seek information from them on various matters.

compulsorily follow the administrative orders of the *Pradhan* (Author's field interview, dated 17/12/2009). In all West Bengal GPs, therefore, GP staff members are under the decision making control of elected representatives.

On the monitoring and sanctioning dimensions of indirect accountability, the *Pradhan* has hardly any control on GP staff members, but s/he does enjoy significant decision making control over the staff members. This is the common situation in both the chosen West Bengal GPs, and thus there is no significant or noticeable variation between them as far as the actual operation of the formal mechanisms of indirect accountability is concerned.

The responsibility of staff members is to preserve rules, regulations and government orders, and ensure that these are followed in the decisions of the GP. Such situations frequently arise, as pointed out by the Executive Assistants of the two GPs, where the orders of the *Pradhan* are in conflict with the existing rules, especially those pertaining to beneficiary selection or spending in schemes being implemented by GPs.

The Executive Assistant is on the one hand held answerable by the bureaucratic personnel in the higher tiers if rules are violated in GP decisions, and on the other hand has no independent administrative powers and has to compulsorily follow the orders of the *Pradhan*. The Executive Assistants of the chosen West Bengal GPs told the author that they often have to face such sticky situations of conflict between rules and *Pradhan* orders (Author's field interviews with Executive Assistants of Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP, dated 11/09/2009 and 17/12/2009 respectively). The Executive Assistant of Debipur GP revealed that he seeks help and advice from the block-level bureaucrats such as the BDO when such situations of conflict arise (Author's field interview, dated 11/09/2009).

The overall situation for GP staff members is one of conflict between accountability to the higher tiers and accountability to the *Pradhan*. After all, the GP does not recruit its own staff. While staff members are obliged to follow administrative orders of the *Pradhan*, they are employees of the state government, and their recruitment, pay, transfer, leave, punishment and promotion are all handled by the higher tiers of the state administration.

Conclusion

It was seen in this chapter that Nowdapanur GP was ahead of Debipur GP on two out of three dimensions of (direct) accountability--the sanctioning dimension and the deliberation dimension. Nowdapanur GP did clearly better on the sanctioning dimension because of the higher competitiveness of its elections. It was also ahead on the deliberation dimension because of its higher and more inclusive attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings and also a more active role of *Gram Sansad* meetings in scrutinizing and criticizing GP records. On the monitoring dimension, however Debipur GP was ahead because of its higher frequency of Social Audit, its relatively more serious carrying out of Social Audit, and also the higher perceived effectiveness of Social Audit according to its staff members and elected members. In summary, Nowdapanur GP has higher overall accountability than Debipur GP because it is ahead on a majority of accountability dimensions, including the crucial sanctioning dimension.

This chapter carried out an assessment of accountability in two GPs of West Bengal using a systematic operational scheme of accountability dimensions and indicators. The accountability mechanisms for both these GPs have the same institutional (legal) features, and what was assessed in this chapter was the variation in the actual functioning of these mechanisms. A broader understanding of accountability

can be obtained through a study of GP accountability in another Indian state, which has accountability mechanisms with different institutional features. Therefore, the next chapter (Chapter 5) will elaborate the operation of accountability in the chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh, whose accountability mechanisms such as elections and deliberative forums (*Gram Sabhas*) have highly interesting and distinct institutional features.

The operation of accountability mechanisms is creating a certain degree of popular control on the West Bengal GPs and their members, but one should not assume that such control will automatically improve GP performance. Each accountability mechanism can have a significant impact on GP performance only if it fulfils certain conditions. The impact of the accountability mechanisms operating in the chosen West Bengal GPs on GP performance will be explored in a later chapter (Chapter 7).

CHAPTER 5

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE MADHYA PRADESH CASES

This chapter assesses the extent of accountability in the two chosen cases (GPs) in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The first three sections of this chapter correspond to the assessments of the sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring dimensions of accountability respectively. As already stated, accountability as measured in this study focuses on accountability of the GP to the people, known as direct accountability.⁴⁵ It is such direct accountability that is assessed in the first three sections of this chapter.

Following these three sections is a brief section on the extent of the accountability of staff members to elected representatives in the two GPs (indirect accountability). Because of the lack of any noticeable variation in indirect accountability between the two chosen GPs, the variation in overall accountability between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs only reflects the variation in direct accountability. The concluding section provides an aggregate assessment of accountability in the two chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs, on the basis of the cumulative assessment of the three (direct) accountability dimensions.

The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability

In Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, elections and Right to Recall are the two available mechanisms through which local residents can sanction their elected GP representatives. In reality, however, the Right to Recall has never been exercised in either of the two GPs of Madhya Pradesh chosen for this study. Therefore the sanctioning dimension of accountability will be assessed in terms of indicators

⁴⁵Normally direct accountability is only of elected representatives to the people. Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* Law however also makes the GP staff member (Secretary) directly accountable to the people in some ways.

pertaining only to elections. The main emphasis in evaluating the effectiveness of elections as a sanctioning mechanism is on assessing their competitiveness.

The indicators used to assess elections as a sanctioning mechanism pertain to their competitiveness, freeness, and voter turnout. Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law does not allow for *Panchayat* elections at any level (GP, block or district) to be conducted on a political party basis.⁴⁶ Therefore, the assessment of electoral competitiveness in Madhya Pradesh GPs cannot be based on indicators such as proportion of seats not won by the ruling political party and turnover of ruling party; it is therefore based on indicators related to proportion of GP seats that were contested, and contestation of chairperson seat. The actual situation with respect to various indicators of the sanctioning dimension in the two chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs—Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP—is described in the remaining paragraphs of this section, and summarized in Table 8 below. Data for the 2005 and 2010 *Panchayat* elections has been used to assess these indicators.⁴⁷

Proportion of Contested Seats and Contestation of Sarpanch Seat

In the 2005 election in Goutampur Colony GP, only two out of twenty *Panch* (GP elected representative other than chairperson) seats were filled through contested election, and eighteen seats were filled in an uncontested manner. In the 2010 election, all twenty *Panch* seats of this GP were filled in an uncontested manner. In Ramgarh GP, in 2005, five out of the fourteen GP seats were filled through contested election, and

⁴⁶While political parties in reality play an unofficial or de facto role in block and district level *Panchayat* elections, GP-level elections are almost devoid of political party involvement.

⁴⁷Election figures for the Madhya Pradesh GPs have been gathered both for the latest election (2010) and the previous one (2005). The 2005 figures have been obtained because the data pertaining to other accountability mechanisms, and the performance figures of the GPs, are mostly for 2008-09 or 2009-10, for both the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies. It is necessary to note the electoral composition of the GP that was in power in 2008-09 and 2009-10, especially for the purpose of inferring the causal relationship between accountability and performance. The 2010 figures have also been used, for the purpose of inferring persisting trends of electoral competitiveness, and also because of non-availability of data on indicators such as voter turnout, turnover of incumbents and freeness for the earlier elections.

nine were filled in an uncontested manner. In the 2010 elections, only thirteen out of fourteen seats of Ramgarh GP were filled, since one seat was empty at the end of the election. Contested election was held in five seats out of the thirteen seats, and eight were filled in uncontested manner.

Table 8: The Sanctioning Dimension of Accountability: Effectiveness of Elections in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2005 and 2010 *Gram Panchayat* Elections)

Indicators	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>			
	Goutampur Colony GP		Ramgarh GP	
	2005	2010	2005	2010
Proportion of contested seats	2/20 (10%)	0/20 (0%)	5/14 (35.7%)	5/13 (38.5%)
<i>Sarpanch</i> (chairperson) election contested?	yes	no	yes	Yes, tie between two leading candidates. Result decided through draw-of-lots
Degree of defeat of incumbent representatives seeking re-election	No data	Not applicable	No data	No incumbent from previous term stood for re-election
Voter turnout	No data	Not applicable	No data	92.73%
Freeness of elections	No data	Not applicable	No data	No coercion or intimidation of voters.

Source: Data obtained from Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission, villager survey interviews and interview of the Secretaries of the two GPs

According to Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, the *Sarpanch* (chairperson) is elected directly by the people (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 17). The *Sarpanch* seat in Goutampur Colony GP was filled through contested election in 2005 but was uncontested in 2010. The *Sarpanch* election in Ramgarh GP was contested in both 2005 and 2010, and was actually very hotly contested in the latter. The *Sarpanch* position of Ramgarh GP was reserved for a woman in the 2010 elections, and as many as fourteen candidates contested, with the results showing a tie between the two leading candidates. Both leading candidates obtained 194 votes each, and the second runner-up

was close behind winning 190 votes. The winner was chosen through a draw-of-lots in accordance with election rules.

The election results of Goutampur Colony GP for 2005 show a low degree of electoral contestation while the 2010 results show a total absence of such contestation. The author, through conversations with the newly elected *Sarpanch* and *Panchas* of Goutampur Colony GP, tried to discover the reasons behind the total absence of competition in 2010. The newly elected *Sarpanch* of this GP stated dialogue and agreement among the villagers about the benefits of uncontested elections (including the reward money that would be obtained from the state government) to be the reasons behind the occurrence (Author's field interview, dated 17/03/2010).⁴⁸ Some newly elected *Panchas* elaborated that villagers unanimously agreed on the names of candidates of their choice during meetings held in temples in all the villages and hamlets of this GP (Author's field conversation, dated 18/03/2010).

Contrasted with the views of the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas* about how the totally uncontested election of Goutampur Colony's GP members and *Sarpanch* was achieved through discussion and rational consensus, there were some views that stressed that the absence of contestation was not the result of widespread discussion or genuine consensus. A school teacher in the GP (who requested anonymity) opined that the uncontested election was a sham; ordinary villagers, he said, had no role to play in the process. This teacher said that the *Sarpanch* actually sent his own supporters to the meetings where discussion and selection of candidates were held (Author's field interview, dated 22/03/2010). A local politician belonging to the Indian National Congress (INC) revealed that the uncontested election of *Sarpanch* in Goutampur

⁴⁸ The Department of *Panchayats* and Rural Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh, has instituted a *Nirvirodh Nirvachan Puraskar Yojana* (programme to reward uncontested election) where prize money is given to GPs electing their *Sarpanch* in an uncontested manner, or *Sarpanch* and all *Panchas* in uncontested manner, or all women GPs with *Sarpanch* and all *Panchas* elected in uncontested manner (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2008-09).

Colony GP was possible because the *Sarpanch* seat was reserved for an Other Backward Classes (OBC) candidate (Author's field conversation, dated 28/03/2010).⁴⁹

This GP has an overwhelming SC and ST majority, with only seven OBC households in the whole GP. There was no contestation in the *Sarpanch* election because of the low availability of candidates.

The actual reality of how the completely uncontested election happened in 2010 in Goutampur Colony GP is difficult to infer, in view of the contradicting responses. However it must be noted that even in the previous (2005) election a very high proportion (90%) of *Panchas* were chosen in an uncontested manner. Therefore the relative absence of any major electoral contestation seems to be the enduring reality in this GP. The consensus on selection of *Panchas* achieved in the 2010 elections should be seen as an incremental progress on the 2005 elections, rather than as solely a product of the *Sarpanch*'s efforts (or machinations, according to the critical view). As far as the uncontested election of the *Sarpanch* is concerned, it can be attributed significantly to the low availability of candidates due to OBC reservation.

In Ramgarh GP, the state of electoral contestation, as far as *Sarpanch* election is concerned, is completely in contrast to that of Goutampur Colony GP. The competition in the *Sarpanch* election in 2010 was extremely intense, and the *Sarpanch* contest was seen by villagers as an inter-village competition, a contest between candidates representing the constituent villages of the GP. The interviews with the *Panchas*, *Sarpanch*, GP Secretary and villagers of this GP revealed the mutual distrust between the residents of the constituent village of Neenaur and Ramgarh, a discord aggravated

⁴⁹Reservation for women, and SCs and STs, is applied to *Sarpanch* positions as per Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law and *Panchayat* election rules. The proportion of *Sarpanch* seats reserved for SCs and STs to the total number of *Sarpanch* seats in a block should equal the proportion of SC and ST population to the total population of the block. Where the total population of SCs and STs in a block is less than 50%, there is reservation of 25% of *Sarpanch* seats for OBC candidates. Half of all *Sarpanch* seats in a block are reserved for women. The selection of GPs in which *Sarpanchas* are to be from the reserved categories is done on the basis of rotation and draw-of-lots (Government of Madhya Pradesh 1995, Rule 7; 2009a, Section 17).

by the results of the *Sarpanch* election. Because of the victory of the Neenaur candidate and the defeat of the Ramgarh candidate, there were some minor incidents of violence in Ramgarh village in the aftermath of the elections.

However, it is not proper to attribute all electoral contestation in Ramgarh GP to the inter-village divide alone; such divide is not relevant to the election of *Panchas* who are chosen from wards that lie within single villages. Five *Panchas* were chosen through contested elections in both the 2005 and 2010 elections, which implies that there is a degree of electoral contestation within villages as well. While the degree of contestation of *Panch* elections of Ramgarh GP is no doubt relatively higher than that of Goutampur Colony GP, it is quite low in absolute terms: the majority of *Panch* positions of this GP were filled in an uncontested manner. Such low contestation points to the low interest in contesting *Panch* elections. Such low interest might be due to the lower power and influence enjoyed by *Panchas* (compared to the *Sarpanch*), and is in keeping with the overall pattern in Madhya Pradesh where interest to contest *Panch* elections is low.⁵⁰

It is worth asking to what degree the phenomenon of uncontested elections is due to lack of interest among villagers to participate as candidates in elections, and to what degree it can be attributed to a genuine consensus and harmony of viewpoints. Lack of interest appears to be an important reason behind the low levels of contestation of *Panch* elections in both GPs. However, 100% uncontested election, where achieved, is not possible only through lack of interest and requires some purposeful consensus building efforts to attain it. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the lack of

⁵⁰In the 2005 *Panchayat* elections, 57.2% of all *Panch* seats in Madhya Pradesh were filled in an uncontested manner. In these elections, only 3.6% *Sarpanch* positions were filled in an uncontested manner (Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission 2006).

contestation should be rewarded (as the Madhya Pradesh state government does), because it may be attributed, at least partly, to the lack of interest to contest elections.

Degree of Electoral Defeat of Incumbent Representatives

The degree of electoral turnover of GP members, through electoral defeat of incumbent members contesting re-election, is an indicator of electoral competitiveness. In Goutampur Colony GP, the fact of 100% uncontested election of GP members in 2010 meant that none of the members from the previous term contested re-election in 2010 (because there was no contested election). Only one *Panch* from the previous GP became a member in the new (uncontested) GP chosen in 2010. In Ramgarh GP, all the *Panchas* and even the *Sarpanch* chosen or elected in 2010 are first time GP members. None of the members of the previous term of Ramgarh GP stood for elections in 2010, as per information obtained from the Secretary of this GP (Author's telephonic interview, dated 9/09/2010).

What could be the reasons for the total absence of incumbent members contesting re-elections in Ramgarh GP? Reservation of seats with rotation of reserved seats might be one valid reason behind the phenomenon, since it is very likely to discourage interested incumbents from contesting. A high percentage of seats is reserved in this GP—50% for women and 25% for OBCs—in addition to a smaller percentage reserved for SCs and STs.⁵¹ Reservation for OBCs and women is on a rotational basis, which prevents willing candidates, if any, from seeking re-election from their own constituency. The *Sarpanch* seat became reserved for women candidates in 2010 because of rotational reservation, preventing the incumbent male *Sarpanch* from contesting for it.

⁵¹This reason was also stated by the Secretary of Ramgarh GP (Author's telephonic interview, dated 06/03/2012), and an INC politician and highly educated native of Ramgarh GP (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010).

Yet the question remains—if the proportion of seats subjected to rotational reservation was of a low degree, would a significant proportion of incumbent *Panchas* seek re-election in Ramgarh GP? While it is not possible to give a conclusive answer to this, it remains questionable whether a significant number of members would be willing or interested to contest re-election in the first place. It has already been seen that interest in contesting *Panch* elections is quite low, and it will be seen in a later chapter of this study that low enthusiasm and motivation are also a feature of incumbent *Panchas*. Given such low interest, it remains highly questionable whether there would be many *Panchas* willing to contest re-elections in the absence of constraints imposed by rotational reservation.

Voter Turnout

The voter turnout in the 2010 *Panchayat* elections in Ramgarh GP was 92.73%, as per figures obtained from the Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission. All sixteen respondents of the villager survey in Ramgarh GP said that they had voted in the last GP elections in 2010. There was no voting for GP candidates in Goutampur Colony GP in 2010 because of uncontested election of all *Panchas* and the *Sarpanch*.

Freeness of Elections

All the sixteen villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP stated that they had faced no intimidation or coercion during voting in the GP elections of 2010. As already stated, there was no voting in Goutampur Colony GP in 2010 because of totally uncontested GP election, therefore the indicator of freeness is not relevant for the 2010 elections in this GP.

Overall Effectiveness of Sanctioning Mechanism

The account given in this section shows that Ramgarh GP is ahead of Goutampur Colony GP on two indicators related to electoral competitiveness (proportion of contested seats and contestation of *Sarpanch* seat). No inference can be made about Ramgarh GP's superiority on the other competitiveness indicator (degree of electoral defeat of incumbent representatives). This is because none of Ramgarh GP's incumbent members contested re-election, while the absence of contested elections in Goutampur Colony GP in the latest GP election (2010) rules out the possibility of any incumbent member contesting re-election. On the basis of the above-mentioned two indicators on which valid comparisons have been made, Ramgarh GP is inferred as having higher electoral competitiveness than Goutampur Colony GP.

On the voter turnout and freeness indicators, too, valid comparisons between the two GPs are not possible with respect to GP elections because of the lack of contested GP election in Goutampur Colony GP in 2010. Considering all the indicators pertaining to the effectiveness of elections as a sanctioning mechanism, Ramgarh GP can therefore be seen as having a higher effectiveness of elections as a sanctioning mechanism. This is due to the higher competitiveness of its *Panch* and *Sarpanch* elections for the 2005 and 2010 elections. In fact the 2010 election results show a very clear contrast between the two GPs' levels of electoral competition with respect to the *Sarpanch* election. The fact of uncontested election of *Sarpanch* in one versus a tie between the two leading candidates in the other illustrates this contrast very clearly.

The results of the 2005 and 2010 elections combined show a trend of higher electoral competitiveness in Ramgarh GP vis à vis Goutampur Colony GP. Voters of Ramgarh GP therefore enjoy relatively greater choice in evaluating contesting

candidates and choosing their *Sarpanch* and *Panchas*, which results in a higher degree of accountability (in terms of popular voice) exercised through the means of elections.

The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability

Like some other Indian states such as West Bengal and Kerala, Madhya Pradesh has also gone in for deliberative assemblies at a level lower than the whole GP. Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law provides for single-village level Village Assembly meetings known as *Gram Sabha* meetings (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 2 and Section 5-A).⁵² This implies that if a GP has more than one village, then each village in that GP shall have its own *Gram Sabha*.

Four regular meetings of the *Gram Sabha* are to be held in one year--in April, August, October and January--and special meetings have to be held whenever ordered by higher-level authorities such as the District Collector, *Janpad Panchayat* (block level *Panchayat*) or *Zila Panchayat* (district level *Panchayat*). The GP may also convene special meetings, as may the members of *Gram Sabha* if they so desire (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010).⁵³ According to Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, the quorum required for holding *Gram Sabha* meetings is one-tenth of all the members of *Gram Sabha*, or 50 members, whichever is less (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 6).⁵⁴

The *Panchayat* law in Madhya Pradesh is unique compared to those of other Indian states because of its provision of *Gram Swaraj*. With the introduction of the system of *Gram Swaraj* in 2001, *Gram Sabhas* have, by law, been made sovereign in

⁵²*Gram Sabha* meetings in West Bengal refer to the meeting of all the voters in the whole GP area, whereas in Madhya Pradesh it refers to single-village level meetings of voters.

⁵³The Secretary of the GP has to convene a meeting of *Gram Sabha* within seven days if 10% members of *Gram Sabha*, or the *Sarpanch* of the GP, make a request for a special meeting of *Gram Sabha* to be held.

⁵⁴As per the amendment to the *Panchayat* law made in 2001, the quorum was fixed at 20% or one-fifth. In 2005 this quorum requirement was reduced to one-tenth.

village governance through transfer of all GP powers to the *Gram Sabha*. This reform was heralded by some authors as signifying a transition from representative democracy to direct democracy at the village level (Manor 2001; Behar and Kumar 2002).

The binding nature of the decisions made by the *Gram Sabha* is stated clearly in Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law. As per the law, the GP is supposed to carry out the recommendations made by the *Gram Sabha* in the exercise of its powers (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7). Some of the powers of *Gram Sabha* in Madhya Pradesh are similar to the powers of *Gram Sansad* in West Bengal: these include the powers to identify development works and beneficiaries. They also include powers of ratification, for example powers to ratify/approve the annual plan and budget of the GP.

What is unique in the legal provisions of Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* system is that executive, implementation and regulatory powers, which one expects to be the preserve of an executive body like the GP, are given to the *Gram Sabha*. These powers, transferred from the GP to the *Gram Sabha* include (a) powers to construct and maintain assets such as public wells, roads, drains etc. (b) regulatory powers such as regulation of shops and eating houses, and maintenance of records of births, deaths and marriages (c) implementation powers such as the execution of development schemes and development work being done in the *Gram Sabha* area (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7). Legally speaking, the role of the GP in *Gram Swaraj* is to carry out whatever is decided in *Gram Sabha* meetings; therefore the *Sarpanch* and the GP are required by the law to entirely subordinate themselves to the control of the *Gram Sabha* (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2005).

For the execution of its executive and regulatory functions, the *Gram Sabha* is legally empowered to constitute standing and ad-hoc committees. The present legal provisions provide for two standing committees of *Gram Sabha*: the *Gram Vikas Samiti*

(translated as Village Development Committee) and *Gram Nirman Samiti* (translated as Village Construction Committee) (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7-A).

The *Gram Nirman Samiti* is supposed to execute all construction works entrusted by the GP or *Gram Sabha*. The *Gram Vikas Samiti* is required to perform functions as defined by rules (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010), though such rules are yet to be made by the government. The *Sarpanch* of the GP, as per the *Panchayat* law, is supposed to be the ex-officio president of both these standing committees of *Gram Sabha* (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7-B). This is one caveat, among others, through which the power of the *Sarpanch* is preserved in the context of *Gram Swaraj*. Apart from the standing committees, the *Gram Sabha* can also constitute ad-hoc committees to perform particular implementation tasks in a time bound manner, as and when it wishes (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7-A).

The above account describes the legal (institutional) features of the *Gram Sabhas* in Madhya Pradesh. The revolutionary legal provisions create positive expectations about the actual role of the deliberative forum of *Gram Sabha* in the GPs of Madhya Pradesh. It is not necessary, however, that the actual functioning of *Gram Sabha* will in all cases, fulfil the requirements of the law. The actual effectiveness of *Gram Sabha* in the two chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs is evaluated in the following paragraphs of this section, according to the indicators of the deliberation dimension of accountability. Table 9 summarizes the comparative situation in the two GPs with respect to these indicators, using 2008-09 data from GP records, and other sources such as GP Secretary interviews, villager survey interviews and direct observation by the author.

Table 9: The Deliberation Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of *Gram Sabha* in the Madhya Pradesh GPs

Indicator	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	
	Goutampur Colony GP	Ramgarh GP
Frequency of <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	Total of 11 meetings held for 2 villages (average of 5.5 for each village) as per records.	Total of 13 meetings held for 3 villages (average of 4.3 for each village) as per records.
Extent of attendance in <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	Average attendance of 18.7%. The larger village, Goutampur Colony, however had lower than quorum attendance in most meetings, and average attendance of 7.4%, as per records. More widespread attendance due to higher awareness about <i>Gram Sabha</i> and its meetings	Attendance figures in GP records are of questionable reliability. Actual reality (as revealed through interviews with villagers and elites) appears to be of very meagre attendance, usually far below quorum. Very few villagers attend because of very low awareness about <i>Gram Sabha</i> and when its meetings are held.
Inclusiveness of attendance in <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	High degree of attendance by women High attendance by SCs and STs	Low degree of attendance by women Low attendance by SCs and STs
Inclusiveness of decision making of <i>Gram Sabha</i>	GP prepares list of proposals and gets it approved in <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings. Proposals made mostly by GP, and rarely by villagers.	GP prepares list of proposals and gets it approved in <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings. Proposals made mostly by GP, and rarely by villagers.
Extent of scrutiny of GP functioning in <i>Gram Sabha</i> meetings	Attendees are very vocal. Some degree of scrutiny and interrogation by attendees about GP functioning.	Almost non-existent scrutiny and interrogation of GP functioning by attendees. One-sided communication by <i>Sarpanch</i> and Secretary.

Source: Data obtained from GP records (2008-09 figures), GP Secretary interviews, villager survey interviews and direct observation

Frequency of Gram Sabha Meetings

The official records of Goutampur Colony GP show that a total of eleven *Gram Sabha* meetings were held in this GP in 2008-09. Seven of these meetings were held in its larger constituent village (Goutampur Colony village) and four were held in its other village, Kesalwada. This means that the average number of meetings held in each

village is 5.5. The meetings held in the villages of Goutampur Colony GP comprised regular and special sessions. As already stated, the law mandates the holding of four regular meetings in every *Gram Sabha* area (village) in a year. In Goutampur Colony village, all four regular meetings were held in 2008-09. In Kesalwada village, records show that only two out of the four regular meetings were held. In addition to the regular meetings, three special sessions were held in Goutampur Colony village, and two such sessions were held in Kesalwada village. The special sessions were convened by higher bureaucratic authorities for discussion of particular topics such as discussion of NREGA action plan and labour budget, and addition of names to voters lists.

In Ramgarh GP, a total of thirteen *Gram Sabha* meetings for its three constituent villages were held in 2008-09, as per GP records. This means that the average number of meetings held in each village is 4.3, and therefore lower than Goutampur Colony GP. The records state that five meetings each were held in the constituent villages of Neenaur and Ramgarh, and three were held in the village of Bawdikheda.

Extent of Attendance in Gram Sabha Meetings

The average *Gram Sabha* meeting attendance of Goutampur Colony GP, calculated on the basis of attendance figures from GP records, is 18.7%. For Goutampur Colony village of this GP (which is the larger constituent village of this GP), the average attendance in the meetings held in 2008-09, however, was only 7.4%. Only one meeting in this village (with 63 out of its 602 voters attending) had an attendance figure that met the quorum. None of the other six meetings of Goutampur Colony village achieved the quorum, though only two meetings out of these were rescheduled because of low attendance. This shows that the legal provision of quorum is not applied strictly. For Kesalwada village of Goutampur Colony GP, the average attendance of 15 persons out

of the total voter strength of 50 (30%) is much higher than the quorum and is actually quite high. The average attendance figure of 18.7% for the whole GP is quite high, but can be significantly attributed to the disproportionately high attendance in Kesalwada village.

In Ramgarh GP, attendance records of *Gram Sabha* meetings are kept by the GP office, though their reliability is thrown into doubt when one considers villager survey responses. Ramgarh GP's records for 2008-09 show that quorum was achieved in all the *Gram Sabha* meetings held in its three villages, with the average attendance in Ramgarh village being 10.64%, in Neenaur village being 12.8%, and in Bawdikheda village being 12.74%, respectively. The average attendance in Ramgarh GP (calculated on the basis of the available figures from the GP records) was 12.06%, thus lower than the average attendance of Goutampur Colony GP. The evidence from GP records however, has been checked with interview-based insights in order to assess reliability. While the survey responses do not precisely reveal the actual extent of attendance, they do provide valuable qualitative insights that help establish, or throw into doubt, the reliability of the figures from GP records. Therefore the author spoke to village residents in both GPs in order to obtain a better picture of the actual reality of *Gram Sabha* attendance in the two GPs.

A striking difference about the reality of *Gram Sabha* meetings between the two GPs emerges from the villager survey findings. One fourth of the villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP claimed that *Gram Sabha* meetings are either not held in their village, or were last held more than five years back. No survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP made such a claim. However, the claim that *Gram Sabha* meetings are not held at all in Ramgarh GP does not seem to be true, because two survey respondents in Ramgarh GP (one recent *Gram Sabha* attendee and one non-attendee,

both belonging to Ramgarh village) attested to the fact that meetings are indeed held in their village.⁵⁵ A highly educated politician (belonging to the INC), who is a native of Bawdikheda village of Ramgarh GP, also confirmed that meetings are indeed held in Ramgarh GP, but with very low attendance (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010). Reconciling the various villager survey and elite responses obtained from Ramgarh GP, the reality seems to be that meetings are held in this GP, though with extremely low people's attendance and awareness. Very few people in Ramgarh GP even come to know that *Gram Sabha* meetings are being held, and it appears that the GP makes no effort to publicize these meetings and mobilize people's attendance in them. Given the very low awareness among the people about *Gram Sabha*⁵⁶ and when its meetings are held, actual attendance in its meetings appears to be very meagre and usually far below the quorum. The attendance figures given in the records of Ramgarh GP are therefore of questionable reliability.

In Goutampur Colony GP, on the other hand, awareness about the holding of *Gram Sabha* meetings is much higher, and people's attendance in them is also appreciably higher. This is corroborated by the author's own observation of a *Gram Sabha* meeting in this GP (where the meeting room was completely filled with attendees),⁵⁷ by the interview responses of several recent *Gram Sabha* meeting attendees,⁵⁸ and by the fact that no respondent claimed that meetings are not held in their village. There is no apparent mismatch between the records given in the figures and data from other sources such as interviews and direct observation.

⁵⁵Among the 16 villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP, only three had ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings. Out of these three, only one was a recent attendee, and the remaining two had attended more than five years back.

⁵⁶As many as five persons among the 16 villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP had never heard of *Gram Sabha*. This is higher than the corresponding figures for all the four GPs covered in this study (two in West Bengal and two in Madhya Pradesh).

⁵⁷The author observed a *Gram Sabha* meeting in Goutampur Colony village during her fieldwork period, on 14th April 2010.

⁵⁸In Goutampur Colony GP, seven respondents out of 16 had ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings, of whom five had clear memory of attending meetings in the past year.

Inclusiveness of Attendance in Gram Sabha Meetings

As already seen in Chapters 3 and 4, inclusiveness of attendance refers to the extent that significant sections of the GP population show meaningful attendance in *Gram Sabha* meetings. In Madhya Pradesh GPs, where political party affiliation does not significantly affect GP functioning or people's participation, socio-economic criteria such as gender and caste are relevant for assessing inclusiveness of *Gram Sabha* attendance.

The most obvious difference in the inclusiveness of attendance between Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP is with respect to the attendance of women. In the former, women make up a significant proportion of the attendees. This was seen by the author during her direct observation of a *Gram Sabha* meeting in this GP where there were several female attendees, of whom many were very vocal during the meeting. Furthermore, as many as five out of the seven villager survey respondents of this GP who had ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings were women. Such high attendance by women can be attributed to the relatively more emancipated status of women in Goutampur Colony GP, and the absence of feudal social customs that mandate female seclusion.

The reality of female attendance in Ramgarh GP is quite different from that in Goutampur Colony GP. Out of the three villager survey respondents of this GP who had ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings, only one was a woman.⁵⁹ A highly educated

⁵⁹This female attendee, in her survey interview, revealed a highly outspoken and assertive nature, standing in complete contrast to the usually very docile and diffident characteristics of women in this GP. This woman is a member of a Self Help Group, and works as an *Anganwadi Kendra* (childcare centre) cook. She belongs to the OBC community, which is relatively less affected by the customs of female seclusion compared to the other numerically significant community of this GP, the *Rajputs*. However

young politician belonging to INC, who is a native of Bawdikheda village of this GP, informed the author that women hardly attend *Gram Sabha* meetings of this GP because of the presence of feudal social customs (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010). In fact, the prevalent social customs of this GP dictate that women, even if veiled, usually are not supposed to appear in front of males not belonging to their immediate family. One female villager survey respondent expressly told the author that *purdah* (the custom of female seclusion) is her reason for not attending *Gram Sabha* meetings (Author's field interview with female, general category (*Rajput*) villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010).

Apart from female attendance, the other parameter to judge inclusiveness of *Gram Sabha* attendance is attendance by the marginalized caste groups, SCs and STs. Goutampur Colony GP's population is overwhelmingly dominated by the SCs and STs. Accordingly, as many as fifteen out of sixteen villagers in the villager survey sample were SC and ST, and all seven persons who ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings also belonged to the SC and ST community. In Ramgarh GP, while there is no conclusive evidence of the actual extent of SC and ST attendance, it does appear that attendance of SCs and STs in *Gram Sabha* meetings is very low. Overall attendance by villagers is at a very low level in this GP, and it appears that such attendance is especially low among the SC and ST communities. None of the four SC and one ST respondents in the Ramgarh GP villager survey sample ever attended *Gram Sabha* meetings. Ramgarh GP has a sizeable *Rajput* population, and the influence of the dominant *Rajput* culture has created a very feudal social context.

The feudal social context reinforces inequalities in Ramgarh GP, and hinders the participation of women, and very likely also of the weaker sections such as SCs and

Rajput influence has resulted in other caste groups such as the Scheduled Castes adopting feudal social customs such as female seclusion.

STs, in *Gram Sabha* meetings. The relatively egalitarian social context of Goutampur Colony GP, on the other hand, is responsible for higher attendance of SCs and STs and women in *Gram Sabha* meetings. Goutampur Colony GP, therefore, has much more inclusive *Gram Sabha* meeting attendance in comparison to Ramgarh GP.

Inclusiveness of Gram Sabha Decision Making

The *Panchayat* Law of Madhya Pradesh bestows *Gram Sabha* with the power to decide the list of specific 'schemes' or development projects, which define the work agenda of the GP (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7). This list of schemes, which is ratified in *Gram Sabha* meetings, is considered the decision of the *Gram Sabha*. However in actual reality, it is not the body of *Gram Sabha* meeting attendees of both the chosen GPs that prepares the list of schemes. It is the GP (the general body of GP members) that actually prepares this list (as admitted by the Secretaries of both GPs), which is then ratified in the *Gram Sabha* meeting. The Secretaries of both GPs told the author that any additional proposal made by attendees during *Gram Sabha* meetings is, however, added to the list of schemes (Author's telephonic interviews, dated 11/06/2011).

There are certain limitations in the actual functioning of *Gram Sabha* itself in the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs that act as obstacles to inclusive proposal making by attendees in these meetings. The attendance in *Gram Sabha* meetings is low in both the GPs, and especially low in Ramgarh GP. The non-attendance of the overwhelming majority of villagers means that most villagers are excluded from the process of expressing demands, especially so in Ramgarh GP.

The actual extent to which additional proposals are collected in *Gram Sabha* meetings of both GPs is also quite questionable. In Ramgarh GP, the *Sarpanch* and

Secretary dominate the *Gram Sabha* meeting proceedings and the making of proposals, as revealed by a *Gram Sabha* attendee of this GP (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010) and a young INC politician who is a native of this GP (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010). The *Gram Sabha* minutes of Goutampur Colony GP do not show any record of any proposals made by the attendees (nor did the author see any scheme being proposed in the meeting she observed). In fact the meeting minutes of this GP show that the meetings are used mainly to dispense information about the rules of various government programmes, and sometimes to inform people about the amount of money received by the GP and the progress of work being done by it, rather than to collect proposals from the people. The *Gram Sabha* has become a mere forum to supply information. Its demand-side role is quite peripheral: for instance its meetings are used to add names to the voters' list.

In both GPs, therefore, the body of GP members seem to be dominating the expression of demands for all the villages within them. While the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Goutampur Colony GP have higher attendance and more vocal expression by the attendees, the actual extent of *Gram Sabha* attendees' role in decision making is negligible. Its higher *Gram Sabha* attendance is not leading to more inclusive decision making. Ramgarh GP also suffers from the problem of negligible role of *Gram Sabha* attendees in decision making. There is, therefore, no significant difference between both the GPs as far as the inclusiveness of decision making is concerned.

It was seen previously (Chapter 4) that in the GPs of West Bengal, too, it is not the attendees of the deliberative forum (*Gram Sansad*) who actually prepare the scheme list. The list in West Bengal GPs is prepared by the GUS, which is the executive committee of *Gram Sansad*, with additional proposals from villagers added during

Gram Sansad meetings. In Madhya Pradesh, the law provides for executive committees of the deliberative forum (*Gram Sabha*) known as *Gram Vikas Samiti* and *Gram Nirman Samiti*. However, in actual practice, these committees are non-functional in both GPs.⁶⁰

Given the shortcomings seen in the *Gram Sabha* meetings in the two Madhya Pradesh GPs, the absence of committees of *Gram Sabha* in them is aggravating the lack of inclusiveness in *Gram Sabha* decision making. An active committee of *Gram Sabha* for each village in both GPs could have probably assured more inclusive decision making (in comparison to centralized proposal list formulation by the GP). This would be especially true if such committees employed participatory mechanisms such as ward meetings or neighbourhood meetings to interact with the village residents and collect proposals from them.

Extent of Scrutiny of GP Functioning in Gram Sabha Meetings

While the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Goutampur Colony GP are playing a negligible decision making role, they are playing the role of exposing the GP to a degree of scrutiny, interrogation and criticism. These meetings are enabling people of Goutampur Colony GP to raise complaints and express grievances about matters related to GP governance.

The elements of excitement, shouting and criticism among attendees were very much present in the *Gram Sabha* meeting observed by the author in Goutampur Colony GP. The people freely sought explanations from the Secretary in the meeting, and the Secretary even answered their queries. In the observed meeting, one female attendee asked why her name had been dropped from the *Atigaribi* (extremely poor) list of

⁶⁰In Ramgarh GP, the Secretary informed that the two committees of *Gram Sabha* have been constituted but are non-functional; they don't receive any money or do any work. In Goutampur Colony GP, the Secretary revealed that these committees don't even exist.

persons, to which the Secretary replied that she no longer was eligible to be on the list because she had become a beneficiary of a government pension scheme. The demanding and rendering of such explanations makes for a modicum of transparency and helps demystify, to some extent, the procedural details of government programmes to villagers. Furthermore, the Secretary asked the attendees if they were satisfied with the provision of nutritious food at the *Anganwadi Kendras* located in the GP, in response to which some attending women raised complaints about the quality of food and the misappropriation of food by the woman in charge of distribution of meals.⁶¹

In Ramgarh GP, in contrast, the *Gram Sabha* meetings are not functioning as forums of scrutiny, interrogation and criticism of GP functioning. The author learnt from a *Gram Sabha* meeting attendee that the only components of the meetings are signing of the attendance register by the attendees, and speeches by the *Sarpanch* (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). The meetings are characterized by one-sided communication by the *Sarpanch* or Secretary, and devoid of inputs or expression by the few people who do attend. Furthermore, barring a handful of people, hardly any villager even comes to know when *Gram Sabha* meetings are being held; this insulates the GP from the scrutiny and criticism of almost the entire GP population.

Overall Effectiveness of Deliberative Mechanism

The above assessment of the functioning of *Gram Sabha* in the two GPs, shows that Goutampur Colony GP overall has a higher effectiveness of *Gram Sabha* as a deliberative mechanism. This is because of its superior situation with respect to four out of five indicators pertaining to the effectiveness of *Gram Sabha*. On the remaining

⁶¹GPs are responsible in a broad sense for the proper functioning of *Anganwadi Kendras* and educational institutions within their area. They are, however, required to exercise regular supervision over these institutions to ensure their smooth functioning.

indicator of inclusiveness of *Gram Sabha* decision making, both GPs have no significant difference, because both of them exhibit domination of such decision making by the GP, and negligible role of *Gram Sabha* attendees in making proposals for works.

Goutampur Colony GP not only has a higher frequency of *Gram Sabha* meetings, but also has higher attendance in these meetings. Goutampur Colony GP also has much more inclusive attendance in these meetings, owing to a high degree of attendance by women and the SC and ST groups. The *Gram Sabha* meetings of Goutampur Colony GP also play a more effective role of scrutiny of GP functioning compared to those in Ramgarh GP. Ramgarh GP, in contrast, is characterized by poor functioning of *Gram Sabha* because of meagre attendance. The most glaring defect of *Gram Sabha* meetings in this GP is that most villagers do not come to know about the existence of *Gram Sabha* or the occurrence of its meetings. Among the very few who do attend, the presence of women and SCs and STs is low. The meetings are characterized by one-sided communication by the *Sarpanch* and Secretary, and minimal input and interrogation by the villager attendees. In summary, the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Goutampur Colony GP (while not involving attendees in decision making) exercise higher accountability or popular control than those of Ramgarh GP, because they involve a much wider section of villagers, who are at least able to subject the GP *Sarpanch* and Secretary to interrogation and scrutiny.

Gram Sabha Meetings: True Forums of Deliberative Democracy?

It was seen in the above account that *Gram Sabha* meetings are relatively more effective as a deliberative mechanism in Goutampur Colony GP than in Ramgarh GP. However, it must be noted that the deliberative role of these meetings is rather minimal;

even in Goutampur Colony GP, such role pertains only to information dissemination and a degree of interrogation and criticism of GP functioning by villagers. There are significant shortcomings present in the functioning of *Gram Sabha* in the Madhya Pradesh GPs, which prevents them from emerging as true forums of deliberative democracy. Due to the failure to establish deliberative democracy, accountability or popular control remains limited. This section assesses *Gram Sabha* meetings in the two Madhya Pradesh GPs according to Cohen's (1997) criteria of ideal deliberative procedure.

One yardstick of Cohen's deliberative procedure is that the participants of deliberation should themselves choose the agenda of deliberation. However, in actual practice, the agenda of *Gram Sabha* meetings in Madhya Pradesh GPs is, as observed in the meeting minutes registers, pre-decided and fixed by the upper levels of the government i.e. the state government or the block/district administration. The agenda of the *Gram Sabha* meeting in Goutampur Colony GP (observed by this researcher on 14/04/2010) was also fixed and very lengthy, and with 23 points seemed like a shopping list with items to be ticked off. In any event, such a lengthy agenda is hardly conducive to meaningful discussion on individual items.

Rational debate—the proposing of alternative solutions backed by reasons—is an element absent in the *Gram Sabha* meetings of the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs. As already seen, the *Gram Sabha* meetings are used mainly for information dissemination (Goutampur Colony GP) or characterized by one-way communication by the GP *Sarpanch* or Secretary to a very small audience (Ramgarh GP). Goutampur Colony GP is in a relatively better position than Ramgarh GP as far as expression and participation by attendees is concerned. Nevertheless, an absence of rational debate is evident in the chaotic meeting proceedings of the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Goutampur Colony GP.

Such absence of an orderly and rational approach was evident in the *Gram Sabha* meeting of Goutampur Colony village of Goutampur Colony GP, observed by the author on 14th April 2010. An account of a portion of the proceedings is presented below:

The GP Secretary, who was conducting the meeting's proceedings, informed the attendees that the government programme known as *Nal Jal Yojana* (tap water programme) would become operational from the end of the month. He said that keeping in mind the villagers' complaints regarding water shortage, he would, subject to the villagers' agreement, be framing a resolution stating that all the villagers were ready to pay the required amount of money needed for individual tap connections. He asked if the villagers were ready to pay and take the connections. There was no coherent reply to the Secretary's query from the attending villagers. On being asked by the Secretary again, one female villager commented that she couldn't pay, and suggested that it would be better if a few common pipes were installed in the village in place of individual connections. In the absence of any clear answer from the body of present villagers, it is unknown what resolution the Secretary noted down for this topic.

There were noisy and chaotic scenes when the topic of BPL list was introduced by the Secretary. The Secretary told the attendees that *Gram Sabha* had the power to recommend deletion of names from the BPL list but the *Gram Sabha* is not exercising this power, even though villagers always blame the Secretary for undeserving persons being on the list. The Secretary read out the names of all the persons on the BPL list (87 names) and *Atigaribi* (extremely poor) list (25 names) and asked for recommendation of deletions. Two *Panchas* present at the meeting proposed that the names of all persons owning land should be deleted, to which one lady *Panch* (who professed being BPL and a land title holder) objected. The scene became disorderly when attendees stood up and

crowded around the Secretary's desk. The *Sarpanch* and some villager attendees suggested that the *Gram Sabha* should recommend names for addition before recommending names for deletion, a view that the Secretary turned down. Finally, in the absence of any coherent viewpoint in the meeting, the Secretary announced his decision that names would neither be added to, nor deleted from the BPL list, and any person wishing to add his name had to go directly to the *tehsildar* (a bureaucratic revenue functionary). Some present villagers listed, on a piece of paper, their individual names for addition to the BPL list and tried to give them to the Secretary, but the Secretary sent them back and again told them to go to the *tehsildar*.

The author observed that there was no systematic decision making system in place in the meeting. In fact, no clear collective resolution was seen being reached in the meeting, though there was scope for decisions on at least two issues: the BPL names deletion issue and the water connection issue. This can be blamed partly on the way the meeting was conducted. There was no counting of hands, or attempt to systematically identify people in favour of or against particular courses of action, or any attempt to generate consensus through rational debate. However, the inability to reach decisions must partly be attributed to the body of villagers as well: their lack of any unified organized viewpoint, and their unwillingness to take responsibility on issues such as bearing the cost of individual pipelines (or alternatively coherently indicating their unwillingness to do so), or identifying undeserving persons in the BPL list, are also significantly responsible for the failure to reach decisions. The Secretary thus ends up being the final arbiter on the issues in the absence of any coherent viewpoint from the attending villagers. There is an evident need for conscientization of villagers to make them more capable of rational debate and collective action, and also for the adoption of

meeting procedures that are more conducive to rational debate and systematic decision making.

Cohen's ideal deliberative procedure includes parameters such as procedural and substantive equality of participants. One indicator of procedural equality (i.e. the equal rights of participants at all stages of deliberative process) would be the extent of freedom of speech in *Gram Sabha* meetings. On the positive side, most *Gram Sabha* meeting attendees that this author spoke to perceive that there is freedom of speech. Five of the seven attendees among the sixteen villager survey respondents in Goutampur Colony GP believed that there is freedom for everyone to speak in the meetings. Two out of three attendees among the sixteen villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP have recollection of their participation experience, and both these attendees said that there is freedom for attendees to speak in the meetings. The author herself has observed that the elements of criticism, contention and questioning are very much present in the *Gram Sabha* meeting of Goutampur Colony GP. There appears to be no coercive barrier on attending villagers speaking in such meetings. Nevertheless, procedural equality is highly constrained; because what is expressed by the attendees is not given much importance by the persons conducted the meeting. One *Gram Sabha* attendee in Goutampur Colony GP expressed that she did not believe that there was any freedom to speak in *Gram Sabha*, because the *Sarpanch* does not listen to or give importance to attendees' proposals (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). One of the Ramgarh GP *Gram Sabha* meeting attendees complained that meetings are 'useless' and in practice, the only speaking in the meetings is done by the *Sarpanch* (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

In Goutampur Colony GP, as many as five out of the seven *Gram Sabha* attendees in the villager sample stated that they have spoken in the meetings. The interesting thing to note is the recalled content of what the attendees said: contrary to expectation, most of them (including the non-affluent attendees) did not present their personal demands for benefits of social security schemes, but spoke of general matters such as water logging and the progress of development works in the village. One attendee who did not speak felt that proposals made by attendees are “thrown in the dustbin” (Author’s field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). In Ramgarh GP, only one attendee among the three attendees remembers having spoken in *Gram Sabha* meetings (she attended more than five years back), and she presented a personal demand for an IAY house (Author’s field interview with female, OBC villager survey respondent, dated 3/04/2010).

The yardstick of substantive equality defines that the outcomes of deliberation must not be influenced by wealth or power. Attendance by the poor or marginalized groups is not a problem, at least in Goutampur Colony GP. Several poor people, people from the SCST communities and women attend *Gram Sabha* meetings, as evident from the author’s own observation and the villager survey responses. Ramgarh GP, however, has the problem of very low levels of attendance in general, and low inclusiveness of attendance in particular, especially of women and SCSTs. Unlike in West Bengal GPs, party affiliation is not a determinant of attendance and does not affect its inclusiveness. The Goutampur Colony villager sample had two party members (one from INC and one from BJP) but none of them attend *Gram Sabha* meetings. The Ramgarh sample had one party member (belonging to the BJP) but this subject does not attend.

There is a linkage between organizational affiliation and attendance, as in West Bengal. There were three SHG members in the sample of Goutampur Colony GP, and two out of these three attended *Gram Sabha* meetings. There was one SHG member in the sample of Ramgarh GP and she has attended *Gram Sabha* meetings. One attendee in Goutampur Colony GP attended by virtue of being a member of the Vigilance and Monitoring Committee for NREGA Social Audit, while an attendee in Ramgarh GP had attended in the past by virtue of being a member of *Nyay Panchayat* (rural judicial body). While there is an apparent association between organizational affiliation and attendance in *Gram Sabha* meetings, it must be noted that people not affiliated to organizations also attend *Gram Sabha* meetings (as seen in both GPs), and speak in *Gram Sabha* meetings (as seen in Goutampur Collony GP). Organizational affiliation does not appear to be a serious constraint on substantive equality in the *Gram Sabha* meetings of Madhya Pradesh GPs.

The final criterion of substantive equality is whether the decisions of the deliberative forum are free of the influence of wealth or power. This important criterion of deliberative democracy is unfortunately not fulfilled in *Gram Sabha* meetings of both GPs, because as already seen, the so-called decision of the *Gram Sabha* in both GPs is mostly the decision of the GP itself, passed on to villagers as ‘information’ in *Gram Sabha* meetings. The villager attendees have hardly any role to play in decision making, and are reduced to recipients of information.

It can thus be seen that *Gram Sabha* meetings in Madhya Pradesh GPs have serious shortcomings which prevent their emergence as true forums of deliberative democracy. This failure is all the more glaring, because Madhya Pradesh’s *Panchayat* Law has vested all decision making powers pertaining to village governance in the *Gram Sabha*. The *Gram Swaraj* system was expected to galvanize *Gram Sabhas* and

make them vibrant forums of direct democracy at the grassroots. There is evidently, a huge gap between the ideal of *Gram Swaraj* as envisaged by the law, and the actual functioning of *Gram Sabha*.

The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability

In Madhya Pradesh, the term ‘Social Audit’ as used in *Panchayat* governance refers to not only the institutionalized monitoring process under NREGA but also the popular audit of GP functioning with respect to the various other programmes that it implements.⁶² However, it is only the NREGA Social Audit process that is clearly defined and institutionalized. ‘Social Audit’ as evaluated in this section refers only to the NREGA Social Audit.

The government rules state that Social Audit is to be conducted whenever the state or district administration asks for it to be conducted (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010). The Madhya Pradesh NREGA rules envisage the role of two bodies at the GP level in carrying out Social Audit—the Vigilance and Monitoring Committee (VMC) and the *Gram Sabha*. The VMC, consisting of six villager representatives, is supposed to be constituted in the *Gram Sabha* meeting (Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Rural Development 2010). The duty of the VMC is to monitor the progress and quality of NREGA works. It is supposed to submit a report on completed NREGA works to the *Gram Sabha*. In addition to this, the *Sarpanch* of the GP also has to present to the *Gram Sabha* the complete details of NREGA funds obtained by the GP, and also details of the completed and in-progress works such as date of approval of the work, the amount of funds spent till date, the physical progress of the construction work, etc. The *Gram Sabha* can either indicate its approval of what is presented to it, or express its

⁶²The government rules state that work done under employment generation programmes, beneficiary oriented programmes and other general work done by the GP shall all be evaluated under social audit (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010).

disapproval about the GP's work; in case of the latter it can convey a complaint to the state administration (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010). The Social Audit procedure of Madhya Pradesh, like that of West Bengal, therefore shows a combination of top down and participatory elements.

The Social Audit rules of Madhya Pradesh provide for redress mechanisms to deal with objections raised by *Gram Sabha* in the aftermath of Social Audit. On receiving a complaint from the *Gram Sabha*, the bureaucratic functionary of the state government known as the Sub-divisional Officer may convene a *janch samiti* (investigation committee) to examine the complaints. This committee, after investigation, is required to submit a report to the Sub-divisional Officer, which is then presented in the next *Gram Sabha* meeting. The *Gram Sabha* may, on the basis of the obtained report, choose to ask the Sub-divisional Officer to institute punitive measures against any identified guilty party (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010).

The above account briefly describes the legal or institutional features of NREGA Social Audit. The actual functioning of Social Audit in the two chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs is evaluated below, with respect to the indicators specified in Chapter 3. Table 10 presents a summary of the actual functioning of Social Audit in the two chosen GPs.

Frequency of Social Audit

The data from the NREGA web site shows that only one NREGA Social Audit (in the sense of the elaborate institutionalized procedure described above) had been conducted in the 2009-10 financial year in each of the two GPs.⁶³ Goutampur Colony GP's Social Audit was held from 15-23rd August 2009, and Ramgarh GP's Social Audit was held

⁶³The earliest available data for NREGA Social Audits in Madhya Pradesh is for the year 2009-10. Before this, Social Audits were held, but in a rudimentary sense involving the mere sharing of information about NREGA works with *Gram Sabha*, rather than the more elaborate procedures involved in its current form.

31st July to 15th August 2009, as per the NREGA website (Government of India 2009-10b). Mere presentation of information related to NREGA works was, however, seen as a frequent item in the minutes of *Gram Sabha* meetings of both GPs.

Table 10: The Monitoring Dimension of Accountability: Functioning of Social Audit in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2009-10)

Indicator	Gram Panchayat	
	Goutampur Colony GP	Ramgarh GP
Frequency	One Social Audit conducted. GP staff member (Secretary) actually prepares Social Audit report due to lack of capacity of VMC.	One Social Audit conducted. VMC only carries out casual, and not sustained monitoring.
Extent of popular involvement	<i>Gram Sabha</i> involvement seen as accepted requirement. Credible evidence about actual <i>Gram Sabha</i> role in Social Audit.	<i>Gram Sabha</i> involvement seen as accepted requirement. Absence of credible evidence about actual <i>Gram Sabha</i> role in Social Audit.
Raising of issues and exposure of grievances	Queries were raised with respect to four NREGA works. Documents pertaining to these four works were examined but no complaints made.	No evidence of issues raised, documents examined or complaints made.
Perceived effectiveness (according to GP staff)	Social Audit being done properly, but not really relevant because there is anyway full transparency and absence of irregularities in the GP.	Social Audit is leading to exposure of irregularities and questioning by villagers.

Source: Data obtained from Social Audit pages of NREGA website (Government of India 2009-10b), *Gram Sabha* meeting minutes of the two GPs, and interviews with GP Secretaries

Extent of Popular Involvement in Social Audit

The VMC, which is a committee of village residents, has an important role to play in the conduct of Social Audit, as per government rules. The GP and *Gram Sabha* meeting minutes of both selected GPs mention the constitution of the VMC, along with the

names of the members. VMC members of Goutampur Colony GP, however, find their task challenging because of not being aware of their responsibilities and powers, as stated in the GP meeting minutes of this GP (Minutes of GP general body meeting dated 23/07/2009). The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP also said that the onus of preparing the Social Audit report falls on him, because the VMC members don't understand the technical details of NREGA implementation and are ill-equipped to perform the task of Social Audit (Author's field interview, dated 7/04/2010). The VMC members of Ramgarh GP, too, are not carrying out monitoring in a sustained way, though they do make keep a watch on execution work now and then, and convey their suggestions for improvement to the GP (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 11/06/2011).

The availability of an external monitoring body (VMC) that has villager representatives indeed has positive prospects for vigilant monitoring of NREGA works being done by the GP. The evidence of actual VMC functioning from the two GPs however suggests that VMCs are not being able to perform the task of monitoring in an effective or sustained way.

Apart from the VMC, the other component of villager involvement in the Social Audit process is the role of a popular assembly (the *Gram Sabha*, as per Madhya Pradesh's NREGA rules). In fact, the latter is a superior means of popular involvement since it can involve villagers en masse, unlike the VMC. In the GPs of Madhya Pradesh, *Gram Sabha* involvement in Social Audit appears to be an accepted requirement. This is apparent from the *Gram Sabha* meeting minutes for both the GPs, which show Social Audit as a regular item on the agenda of meetings.

The NREGA website shows credible evidence about actual *Gram Sabha* involvement in Social Audit in Goutampur Colony GP. The website has a record of the

minutes of the *Gram Sabha* meeting held for the purpose of conducting Social Audit in Goutampur Colony GP, containing details such as the date of the meeting (22nd August 2009), and names of the present nodal officer (observer) sent by the government, the GP Secretary and VMC representative. These minutes also mention the presence of 43 villager attendees at the *Gram Sabha* meeting held in Goutampur Colony GP for conducting Social Audit (Government of India 2009-10b). There is no record, in the NREGA website, of the *Gram Sabha* meeting held for conducting Social Audit in Ramgarh GP. There is no mention of the date, the persons present at the meeting or any other detail about such meeting. In the absence of such credible evidence, it cannot be inferred that such a meeting was indeed held in Ramgarh GP.

Raising of Issues and Exposure of Grievances

The NREGA website states that in Goutampur Colony GP, the Social Audit process demanded scrutiny of four NREGA works in progress during that period, and as a result documents pertaining to these four works such as some job cards, muster rolls, cash books, employment registers etc. were examined (Government of India 2009-10b). No discrepancies were found in these documents, and no complaints or grievances were expressed. No information about the queries or issues raised, documents examined and grievances expressed in the Social Audit of Ramgarh GP was available in the NREGA website.

Perceived Effectiveness of Social Audit

The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, when asked about the effectiveness of Social Audit in his GP, said that there was anyway full transparency in his GP, with no procedural irregularities and nothing to hide, because of which Social Audit was

actually unnecessary. Nevertheless, the Secretary expressed that the Social Audit procedure was properly conducted in his GP, with complete information being presented before villagers, and the villagers also raising questions for the *Sarpanch* and Secretary to answer (Author's field interview, dated 17/03/2010).

The Secretary of Ramgarh GP perceived that Social Audit in his GP was leading to some irregularities and problems being exposed (for example revealing that some villagers' NREGA job cards were not yet made). He also mentioned that villagers sometimes questioned the income-expenditure statement. The Secretary perceived that Social Audit was leading to benefits for the villagers (Author's telephonic interview, dated 27/01/2011). The Secretary's response does not, however, fit in with the data obtained from the NREGA website.

Overall Effectiveness of Monitoring Mechanism

Both Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP have conducted the same number of Social Audits (just one), both their VMCs are not adequately performing their task, and both their Secretaries have positive perceptions about the effectiveness of Social Audit in their GP. However, balancing the cumulative evidence on various indicators examined above indicates that Goutampur Colony GP has relatively higher effectiveness of its Social Audit process. This is because there is credible evidence of some mass role (through *Gram Sabha* involvement) in Social Audit, queries being raised and documents being examined because of Social Audit in this GP. The absence of such evidence for Ramgarh GP implies that Goutampur Colony GP is conducting Social Audit more seriously and with greater effectiveness.

Popular Monitoring in the two GPs: More Insights

Apart from the popular monitoring activities taken up in the institutionalized mechanisms such as Social Audit, popular monitoring also exists in other forms. One such form is villagers asking questions to their elected representatives or the Secretary, not only in *Gram Sabha* meetings but also in informal settings. Visits to GP office to ask questions is seldom seen in both GPs; in both of them, it was seen that the GP office remains closed, only opening for special occasions such as *Gram Sabha* and GP meetings, and the office work of the GP is done in the Secretary's residence or in the Block office.

As many as ten villager respondents (out of sixteen) in Goutampur Colony GP stated that they had asked questions to their elected representatives. In Ramgarh GP eight out of sixteen villagers interviewed said that they had asked questions to their elected representatives. The villager survey responses do not show any significant difference in this respect between the two GPs, and indicates that many people question their elected representatives, even in the highly feudal and backward Ramgarh GP. The questions asked by the respondents in both GPs, however, were mostly queries about beneficiary-oriented development schemes, though one female respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, who described herself as the *pol-kholna* (unmasking or exposing) type, questioned a representative about water logging of village roads (Author's field interview with female SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). One interesting response came from a villager respondent in Ramgarh GP who stated that when he enquired about a welfare programme he wished to be a beneficiary of, the elected representative in turn asked him whether he had voted for him in the past GP elections (Author's field interview

with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

This researcher endeavoured to find out the villager survey respondents' perception of people's ability to monitor their representatives. The question asked was: "Can people of this area keep a watch on their representatives?" In Goutampur Colony GP, nine subjects expressed their belief that people of their GP can keep watch on their elected representatives, five subjects expressed a contrary view, one subject stated that the people can keep 'partial watch', while one expressed no opinion. In Ramgarh GP eight subjects stated that people can keep watch, four stated that they cannot, one expressed that only those who attend *Gram Sabha* have information and can keep watch, and three subjects stated that they have no opinion.

Unlike the West Bengal study, where there were significant differences between the two GPs with respect to responses to this question (the more socio-economically backward but electorally competitive GP had a noticeably lower proportion of subjects who believed that villagers could keep watch), there seems to be no significant difference between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs with respect to responses to this question. Furthermore, the proportion of respondents in both the Madhya Pradesh GPs who believe that people can monitor their representatives is higher than the proportion of respondents who believe the same in both the West Bengal GPs.⁶⁴

No definitive conclusion about the experiences and perceptions of the entire GP populations for the selected GPs in both states can be made because of the sampling limitations. The reasons affecting people's ability to monitor; and their perception of such ability are also complex and difficult to infer. However, one possible reason for the

⁶⁴ It can be recalled that among the West Bengal GPs, Debipur GP had a higher proportion of people who believed that people could keep a watch. Six respondents in this GP believed that people could keep a watch. In the two Madhya Pradesh GPs, the number of respondents who believed that people can keep a watch are nine (Goutampur Colony GP) and eight (Ramgarh GP).

observed trends in the Madhya Pradesh villager survey responses could be the high accessibility in Madhya Pradesh GPs. The Madhya Pradesh GPs have a much smaller ratio of representation for elected representatives, along with much smaller size of villages and GPs. This makes for greater accessibility and visibility of elected representatives. Even if not attending *Gram Sabha* meetings, villagers can still easily meet and talk to their representatives, and many of them thus believe that they are able to keep watch on them. The West Bengal GPs are much larger and the ratio of representation is much higher, and means of communication and transportation within GPs are quite underdeveloped, which might be reasons why few people believe that they can keep a watch on the activities of the GP.

Lack of education had been identified as one of the possible determinants of people's ability to monitor in West Bengal GPs. The incidence of illiteracy, especially female illiteracy is quite high on the samples of both the Madhya Pradesh GPs.⁶⁵ In spite of this, perceived levels of ability to monitor are quite high in Madhya Pradesh GPs. None of the respondents in both Madhya Pradesh GPs mention education as a factor linked to ability to monitor. Only one subject mentions lack of consciousness as a factor - one subject in the Goutampur Colony GP sample (who is a former teacher), mentions the lack of consciousness as the reason for low ability of people to monitor (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). One respondent in Goutampur Colony GP however reveals a demand or desire to monitor, by commenting that "One has to be aware of what is going on" (Author's field interview with male, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). Two persons in Ramgarh GP mention the demand side factors of the lack of time because of being busy with livelihood (Author's

⁶⁵ There were eight illiterate respondents in the Goutampur Colony GP sample, of which six were women. There were six illiterate respondents in the Ramgarh GP sample, of which five were women.

field interviews with male, SC and male, general category villager survey respondents of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

The supply-side factor of information availability figures quite prominently in the survey responses of the Madhya Pradesh GPs. Five respondents in Goutampur Colony GP link ability (or inability) to monitor to the availability of information. Three of these five respondents believe that there is a lack of information; one of them stated that the *Sarpanch* doesn't share information with villagers (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010). One respondent in Goutampur Colony GP links ability to monitor partially to lack of full information availability (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010) while one mentions that people can keep watch because there is information available (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010). Four respondents in Ramgarh GP link their responses to the availability of information. Two of them explicitly mention that information is available; one states that information is not available, while the remaining respondent states that those who attend *Gram Sabha* meetings have information (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010). *Gram Sabha* attendance is mentioned by one respondent each in Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP as being a basis of ability to monitor. The predominantly information supplying role of *Gram Sabhas* in Madhya Pradesh is relevant in this respect; one good thing about *Gram Sabha* meetings is that they are giving people some information about the functioning of the GP and their rights and entitlements under various welfare programmes.

Spatial factors are also mentioned: for example one Goutampur Colony GP respondent mentioned that he cannot keep watch on the *Sarpanch* because the latter is from a different village (Author's field interview with male, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010), and one subject from Ramgarh GP mentions that he can keep watch on the *Up-sarpanch* because he is from the same village as himself (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). Two Goutampur Colony GP respondents mention that monitoring is possible because of the close-knit nature of the rural community; they say that people in the village know each other (including their representatives) well, and can thus keep watch on their representatives (Author's field interview with male, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010 and with female, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010).

The factors determining the ability to monitor, and the perception of such ability, are complex and difficult to generalize. The Madhya Pradesh villagers seem to link it mainly to basic information availability and greater visibility which comes from spatial factors--such as small-sized villages, close-knit rural community, and whether they and their leaders (such as *Sarpanch* and *Up-sarpanch*) belong to the same village--without necessarily expecting to scrutinize intensely the decision making considerations and behaviour of the GP and its members. This might be a possible reason why education and consciousness levels do not emerge as prominent determinants of the perception of people's ability to monitor from survey responses in the Madhya Pradesh GPs.

Indirect Accountability: Accountability of GP Staff

Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law allows GPs to have two categories of staff members: the *Sachiv* or Secretary, and additional staff members, if required. The Secretary was found to be the sole staff member in both the GPs chosen for this study. The Secretary is a local resident chosen by the GP, and his appointment has to be approved by the *Gram Sabha* (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2002, 105). This appointment, however, is also subject to approval by the *Zila Panchayat*.

Staff members of local councils, in most local government systems, are only indirectly accountable to the people; they are accountable to elected representatives, who in turn are directly accountable to the people. Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law is unique since it also provides for direct accountability of GP staff members to the *Gram Sabha* (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 6-B). The law, however, does not specify the mechanisms of *Gram Sabha* control over the Secretary, making it difficult to assess the extent of such control. However, it has already been seen in this chapter that the Secretary can be subjected to interrogation by villagers in the deliberative forum of *Gram Sabha*, as seen with respect to Goutampur Colony GP.

In addition to providing for the direct accountability of the Secretary to the *Gram Sabha*, the law also lays down indirect accountability of this functionary to the GP and its *Sarpanch*. Such indirect accountability is the focus of this section. Indirect accountability here refers to the effectiveness of formal mechanisms of control of elected representatives over the GP Secretary. Three dimensions of sanctioning, monitoring and decision making control of the GP elected representatives over the Secretary are used to evaluate indirect accountability.

Sanctioning Dimension

The GP and its *Sarpanch* have not been given any power of sanctioning over the Secretary, as per the law. Such powers have been given to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, a bureaucratic functionary of the state administration. The *Zila Panchayat* has also been given power to initiate disciplinary action against the Secretary, though the actual proceedings of the disciplinary action are conducted by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 16/03/2011).

Due to the absence of formal sanctioning mechanisms, both the GPs in Madhya Pradesh lack the possibility of formal sanctioning of the Secretary by the elected representatives. There is, therefore, no variation between Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP with respect to the sanctioning dimension of indirect accountability.

Monitoring Dimension

As far as the monitoring dimension is concerned, the *Sarpanch* of the GP has been given the power to inspect and supervise the work being done by the Secretary to ensure that the paperwork of the GP is done properly (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2010). The provision of writing performance reports is not relevant to Madhya Pradesh GPs, as Secretaries are chosen locally and assigned to a single GP, and are therefore not subject to promotion or transfer.⁶⁶ The *Sarpanch* therefore only has general powers of supervision over the Secretary, given that there is no specific institutionalized mechanism available for him/her to evaluate the performance of the Secretary.

Even with respect to the general powers of supervision that the *Sarpanch* possesses with respect to the Secretary, it appears that the common situation in both

⁶⁶This information is correct with respect to the fieldwork period (February-April 2010).

GPs is that the *Sarpanch* is unable to exercise effective supervision of this kind. This is because of the information and knowledge asymmetry between the *Sarpanch* and the Secretary. In both GPs, the *Sarpanchas* face the problem of inadequate comprehension of administrative tasks (such as budget preparation), as revealed by the Secretaries of the two GPs (Author's field interviews, with Secretaries of Ramgarh GP and Goutampur Colony GP, dated 30/03/2010 and 17/03/2010 respectively). Therefore, it is unlikely that they are able to exercise effective supervision over the execution of such tasks by the Secretaries. On the monitoring dimension of indirect accountability, too, there is no noticeable variation between the two GPs.

Decision Making Control

The third dimension of indirect accountability of GP Secretaries is the decision making control of the *Sarpanch* and the GP's body of elected representatives over the Secretary. If Secretaries were legally placed under the administrative control of the GP and/or its *Sarpanch*, then there would obviously be a high degree of decision making control of the former over the latter, since the Secretary would be bound to follow the decisions or orders of the GP and/or the *Sarpanch*. GP Secretaries in Madhya Pradesh, however, have been placed under the administrative control of the CEO (JP), the Chief Executive Officer of the *Janpad Panchayat* (block-level *Panchayat*)⁶⁷ and not of the GP or the *Sarpanch*, as per the law (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009b, Rule 6). This means that the administrative orders of the *Sarpanch* are not always binding on the Secretary. The government rules further clarify the administrative accountability of the Secretary to the CEO (JP) by stating that "non-compliance of the valid directions given by the

⁶⁷The Chief Executive Officer of *Janpad Panchayat* is the bureaucratic functionary who is the chief staff member of the *Janpad Panchayat*.

Chief Executive Officer shall amount to misconduct in the discharge of his duties” (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009b, Rule 6).

With respect to decision making control, the common situation in both GPs is that the Secretaries execute the decisions of the GP, though such decisions are not necessarily binding on the Secretary. The legal provisions imply that the orders of the CEO (JP) would have precedence over the orders of the *Sarpanch* and/or the GP, in the event of a clash between the two.

On the one hand, the Secretary of Madhya Pradesh GPs is accountable (in general terms) to the *Sarpanch*, and on the other hand he is under the control of the higher-level authorities. The mechanisms of accountability to the *Sarpanch*, however, have not been specified in the law or rules. This makes the actual nature of such accountability very unclear in the law and in actual practice, and therefore reduces its effectiveness.

The Secretary has been assigned with the responsibility of ensuring the preservation of laws and rules. Even though he is accountable (in principle) to the GP, his responsibility to preserve rules is most fundamental. In fact it is his duty, under the rules, to promptly inform the CEO (JP) when any decision or order of the GP/*Sarpanch* is in violation of the law or any rule or government order (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009b, Rule 3). This provision, together with the administrative control of the CEO (JP) on the Secretary, and the disciplinary control of higher bureaucratic authorities such as the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, resolves the ambiguity in the accountability of the Secretary, by tilting the balance decisively in favour of accountability to the higher level bureaucratic personnel. This happens in spite of the fact that the Secretary is chosen by the GP in Madhya Pradesh.

The interview responses of the Secretaries of both chosen GPs indicate that they themselves give more importance to their accountability to the bureaucracy at the higher levels, compared to their accountability to the GP's elected members. The Goutampur Colony GP Secretary said that he did not experience any accountability conflict because the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas* of his GP don't really pressurize him to violate rules, and even if they ever do, he is very clear in his mind that he will not violate rules in any event (Author's field interview, dated 17/03/2010). The Ramgarh GP Secretary revealed that elected representatives sometimes make demands inconsistent with rules in the early days of their tenure, but they soon give up their unreasonable expectations and come to realize the primacy of rules (Author's field interview, dated 30/03/2010).

It is therefore obvious that the level of control of GP elected representatives on the GP Secretary in Madhya Pradesh GPs is quite low, as established by the law and also in actual practice. Considering the formal sanctioning, monitoring and decision making control mechanisms, there is no noticeable variation between Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP as far as indirect accountability is concerned.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that Goutampur Colony GP is ahead of Ramgarh GP on two out of three dimensions of accountability, the deliberation dimension and the monitoring dimension. Goutampur Colony GP did better on the deliberation dimension owing to its appreciably higher attendance and inclusiveness of attendance in *Gram Sabha* meetings, and also due to its more active scrutiny of GP functioning by *Gram Sabha* attendees. On the monitoring dimension too, Goutampur Colony GP was ahead because of its relatively more serious conduct of Social Audit, as revealed through credible

evidence of its popular involvement in Social Audit and of examination of documents pertaining to on-going NREGA works.

Ramgarh GP does better than Goutampur Colony GP on the sanctioning dimension of accountability because of its higher electoral competitiveness. While the sanctioning dimension is the most significant dimension of accountability, it is not appropriate to assess Ramgarh GP as having higher aggregate accountability merely on account of doing better on this dimension. It has already been stated in the methodology of this thesis (Chapter 3) that a GP which does better on the sanctioning dimension along with doing better on another dimension will clearly be inferred as having higher accountability. Ramgarh GP's poor record with respect to the other two accountability dimensions (especially the deliberation dimension) implies that it cannot be assessed as having higher aggregate accountability. After all, accountability should not be a one-off affair that is exercised only at election time: there should also be some popular control between elections. It can be recalled that in the West Bengal study, the higher electoral competitiveness of Nowdapanur GP was actually responsible for higher attendance in its deliberative forum (*Gram Sansad*), while no such dynamic operated in the case of the more electorally competitive GP in the Madhya Pradesh study.

Furthermore, even though Ramgarh GP is relatively better on the sanctioning dimension, there are shortcomings in its functioning of elections as a sanctioning mechanism, such as electoral competitiveness being restricted mainly to *Sarpanch* elections. Therefore, balancing the evidence on the accountability dimensions, it is not proper to assess Ramgarh GP as having higher aggregate accountability merely on the basis of its relatively higher electoral competitiveness. Considering all these aspects, Goutampur GP, which is ahead on a majority of accountability dimensions (two dimensions of deliberation and monitoring), is assessed as having higher aggregate

accountability than Ramgarh GP. The relationship between accountability and performance for the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs will be explored in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 6

PERFORMANCE OF THE CHOSEN CASES IN THE TWO STATES

GPs in Indian states have been entrusted with diverse roles in various functional areas such as village infrastructure, primary education, social security, agricultural assistance, welfare of women and children, healthcare and sanitation. This chapter evaluates the performance (in terms of service delivery) of the chosen GPs in the states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh with reference to the two functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. These two particular functional areas have been chosen because GPs in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh possess a degree of decision making and implementation autonomy with respect to them. An attempt is made to compare the aggregate performance of the chosen GPs in West Bengal in the first section, and of the chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh in the second section of this chapter, with the final section of the chapter briefly summarizing the findings on performance for the two state studies.

Performance of the Chosen GPs of West Bengal

The performance of the two chosen GPs of West Bengal—Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP—is evaluated in this section with respect to two functional areas: firstly infrastructure and then, alternative primary education, followed by an assessment and comparison of aggregate performance of the two GPs.

Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure

Infrastructure development is of special importance in rural local governance, because amenities such as all-weather roads and readily accessible sources of water supply

which are often taken for granted in urban areas are not frequently found in rural areas, and their availability makes a significant difference to the quality of life of the rural populace. The GP's role in developing rural infrastructure stems from two sources: the state *Panchayat* law, and state and central government infrastructural programmes. The West Bengal *Panchayat* Act vests GPs with the power and duty to construct and maintain "public streets", sources of water supply, and means of irrigation (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 19). The GP's role in infrastructural development, however, arises more specifically from its task of implementing central and state government infrastructure development programmes. Almost all GP infrastructural works are undertaken under these programmes (with funds transferred from central/state government), since the GPs usually have negligible amounts of Own-Source Revenue. GPs have the power to undertake specific infrastructural projects under these programmes (selected from the list of works proposed by the *Gram Sansad*).⁶⁸ In implementing such works, GPs are required to adhere to the rules of these programmes, and conform to a spending limit of INR 200,000 on any specific project.

The performance of the two selected GPs in the functional area of infrastructure is assessed with respect to two sub-dimensions or components: objective output-based measures, and villager satisfaction with infrastructural assets.

Objective Output-Based Measures

In West Bengal's GPs, infrastructure construction, repair and up-gradation are almost always taken up under central government and state government programmes/funds such as NREGA, the Twelfth Finance Commission Fund of the Government of India, and the Untied Fund granted by the Second State Finance Commission of the

⁶⁸See Chapter 4 for details of the *Gram Sansad*'s role in proposing works.

Government of West Bengal. The number of infrastructural assets created and repaired by each GP under these programmes indicates the volume of its infrastructure development activities.

Under NREGA (which is the single largest fund source of the chosen GPs in West Bengal), a total of 90 works/projects were completed by Debipur GP in the year 2008-09, as per GP records. Out of these 90 works, 44 were in the area of infrastructural development (road improvement, re-excavation of ponds, canal repair and land development), and the other 46 were non-infrastructural activities related to afforestation. In Nowdapanur GP, GP records state that a total of sixteen NREGA works were completed in 2008-09, of which two were non-infrastructural (afforestation) and the rest were infrastructural. The details of the completed infrastructural works under NREGA for 2008-09 for the two GPs are given in Table 11.

Table 11: Volume of NREGA Infrastructural Works Completed by the West Bengal GPs (2008-09)

Sector	No. of works done in Debipur GP	No. of works done in Nowdapanur GP
Pond re-excavation	33	9
Road construction/improvement	5	4
Canal re-excavation/repair	5	1
Land development	1	0
Total no. of infrastructural works under NREGA	44	14

Source: Data from the Offices of the two GPs

Table 11 shows a significant difference between the two GPs with respect to the number of infrastructural works completed by them. However these figures by themselves are insufficient to be the basis for any judgment that identifies one GP as superior and the other as inferior in performance. Before making such a judgment, the differences in size and population between the GPs need to be taken into consideration.

Debipur GP is much larger than Nowdapanur GP in terms of area, number of villages, and population (see Appendix), and this might be one reason behind its much larger number of works. Therefore, effectiveness ratios--the ratios of actual output to targeted output--are a sounder basis for comparing the physical performance of the two GPs in the area of infrastructure than the varying quantities of the physical output.

The effectiveness ratios give us a precise idea about the physical performance of GPs by revealing the proportion of their intended or targeted projects that they were able to complete. The data for both GPs, obtained from their latest available audit reports (at the time of fieldwork), shows that for the financial year 2007-08,⁶⁹ both GPs showed a significant gap between actual physical achievement (output) and targeted physical achievement for the different infrastructural programmes that they implement. These figures are shown in Tables 12 and 13.

Table 12: Effectiveness Ratios for Debipur GP for Various Programmes (2007-08)

Programme	Targeted physical achievement	Actual physical achievement	Percentage of target achieved
NREGA	205	74	36.09%
Twelfth Finance Commission Fund	10	8	80%
Untied Fund	14	10	71.4%

Source: Audit report obtained from the Debipur GP office.

Table 13: Effectiveness Ratios for Nowdapanur GP for Various Programmes (2007-08)

Programme	Targeted physical achievement	Actual physical achievement	Percentage of target achieved
NREGA	218	16	7.34%
Twelfth Finance Commission fund	18	1	5.55%
Untied Fund	16	13	81.25%

Source: Audit report obtained from the Nowdapanur GP office

⁶⁹Since 2007-08 performance figures have been used here, the author had made an attempt to present some accountability data for appropriate years (naturally 2008-09 accountability figures cannot be causally linked to 2007-08 performance figures). Therefore this author has tried to present a durable picture of electoral competition (by using 2003 and 2008 data) and *Gram Sansad* effectiveness (by using qualitative data such as villager survey responses).

Tables 12 and 13 show that Debipur GP had overall higher success in meeting targets compared to Nowdapanur GP, considering its much better target achievement for two out of three programmes of infrastructure development (NREGA and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund). However this does not mean that in absolute terms it is always very successful in meeting targets: as far as NREGA is concerned, Debipur GP was able to complete only about 36% of its targeted works. The data for 2008-09 is not much different: Debipur GP in 2008-09 had 444 targeted works for NREGA in its Annual Action Plan, and probably several more in its Additional Annual Action Plan,⁷⁰ but it actually completed only 90 NREGA works. Nowdapanur GP had 273 targeted works in its Annual and Additional Action Plans for 2008-09, and actually completed only 16 works (5.86% of the targeted works).

One reason for the huge gap between the targeted and actual physical achievement of GPs is due to the unrealistically large number of targeted projects. However as stated in Chapter 4, all demands for infrastructure made by the *Gram Sansad* have to be accommodated in the Annual Action Plans of the programmes. Debipur GP- a larger GP than Nowdapanur GP in terms of its number of constituencies, geographical area and population - therefore has many more targeted projects on its Annual Action Plan. The 2007-08 data shows that Debipur GP had greater relative success in meeting the targets of infrastructural programmes.

The figures on effectiveness ratios seen so far however do not shed any light on the effectiveness of GPs with respect to the execution of the works that they *actually* take up from the list of targeted works in the Annual Action Plans. Naturally, they are

⁷⁰The author was unable to obtain the Additional Annual Action Plan of Debipur GP for 2008-09, and therefore was unable to find out the accurate total number of targeted works for the same year, and thus the proportion of completed works to all targeted works for the same year. Hence there is reliance on 2007-08 data to furnish the required insights.

not able to take up all the targeted works. The proportion of completed and in-progress works sheds further light on the effectiveness of the two GPs' infrastructure development activities. Table 14 shows the comparative performance of the two GPs in completing infrastructural works taken up for implementation under NREGA. The data is for three infrastructural sectors for the financial year 2009-10.

Table 14: Number of Completed and In-progress NREGA Works in the West Bengal GPs (2009-10)

Sector/work area	Debipur GP		Nowdapanur GP	
	Completed works	In-progress works	Completed works	In-progress works
Roads construction/improvement	14	0	14	17
Pond re-excavation (water conservation and harvesting + renovation of traditional water bodies)	42	4	19	32
Land development	0	0	1	3

Source: Data collected from Work Status pages of NREGA website (Government of India 2009-10c)

Table 14 also shows that Debipur GP has overall been able to complete more NREGA works taken up for implementation, and has lesser unfinished works than Nowdapanur GP. However, in the sector of road construction/improvement, both GPs have been able to finish an equal number of works, and Nowdapanur GP has a higher proportion of unfinished works because it had taken up more works in this sector. The pond excavation figures however show that Debipur GP had greater progress in finishing works. As far as all categories of NREGA outputs (both infrastructural works and non-infrastructural works such as afforestation) for the financial year 2009-10 are concerned, Debipur GP had a work completion rate of 98.61%, completing 71 out of 72 works started in the same year. For the same year, Nowdapanur GP had a work completion rate of 71.43%, completing 40 out of 56 of all NREGA works

(infrastructural and non-infrastructural) started in the same year (Government of India 2012-13). The relative superiority of Debipur GP is also seen with respect to 2010-11 NREGA output figures: Debipur GP completed 98.7% of all NREGA works started in the same year (i.e. 76 out of 77 works). For the same year, Nowdapanur GP completed none of the 70 works that it started in the same year (Government of India 2012-13).⁷¹

The physical output figures presented above show that Debipur GP had relatively greater success than Nowdapanur GP on various objective output-based measures - the quantity of infrastructural outputs, fulfilment of a larger proportion of targets, and a larger proportion of completed works vis à vis in-progress works. However, such objective measures only convey one aspect of GP performance in providing infrastructure. Perceptions-based insights from the village residents, which give an idea of villagers' satisfaction with the infrastructural assets provided by the GP, must also be considered in evaluating the overall performance of the GPs in the functional area of infrastructure.

Villager Satisfaction

In order to obtain an idea of village residents' satisfaction with infrastructural assets provided by the GP, the author obtained perceptions-based insights from the sixteen villager survey respondents interviewed in each chosen West Bengal GP. These insights are valuable in the sense that they come from those who are the actual users of these assets, and therefore well-placed to assess their quality. The author obtained villagers' opinions with respect to their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the quality of roads,

⁷¹The break-up of work status for a few categories of NREGA works for 2010-11 is given: Debipur GP completed seven road works and had one such work in-progress. It completed 60 works of renovation of traditional water bodies, and had three such works in progress. It completed two land development works and had no such work in progress. Nowdapanur GP could not complete any work in any category. It had 30 ongoing road works, 36 ongoing water conservation and harvesting works, and four ongoing land development works (Government of India 2010-11a).

quality of drinking water source and accessibility of drinking water source.⁷² In addition, open-ended responses from the villagers reveal qualitative insights on the extent to which villagers' needs and preferences are being met by the available infrastructural assets (roads and drinking water sources). The following paragraphs elaborate the extent of villager satisfaction with infrastructural assets provided by the GP according to the satisfaction indicators. Table 15 summarizes the extent of villager satisfaction with infrastructural assets provided by the two GPs.

Table 15: Villager Satisfaction with GP-provided Infrastructural Assets in the West Bengal GPs

Satisfaction indicator	Proportion of villager survey respondents satisfied	
	Debipur GP	Nowdapanur GP
Quality of roads	56.25%	37.5%
Quality of drinking water sources	Not applicable Overwhelming dependence on public drinking water source not provided by GP.	Majority dependent on private tube-wells. 57.1% public (GP) tube-well users satisfied
Accessibility of drinking water source	Not applicable Overwhelming dependence on public drinking water source not provided by GP.	Majority dependence on private tube-wells indicates accessibility problems of GP tube-wells. 50% public (GP) tube-well users satisfied with accessibility.

Source: Villager survey interviews conducted in the two GPs

Nine out of sixteen villager respondents (56.25%) in Debipur GP expressed satisfaction with the quality of roads in their village. In Nowdapanur GP six out of sixteen respondents (37.5%) expressed satisfaction with the same. In Debipur GP, where a higher proportion of respondents expressed satisfaction with roads, some

⁷²Roads and drinking water sources (tube-wells) are usually provided by GPs, rather than by state government departments and other higher authorities. These assets are also highly relevant to the villagers' quality of life, and frequently used by them. Hence villagers are asked about their satisfaction with these two specific categories of infrastructural assets.

degree of variation was seen in the responses, reflecting partly the actual condition of roads (which differ from one village to another⁷³ or one neighbourhood to another in the GP) and also the expectation levels (which are modest for some subjects and higher for others). For instance, one respondent in Debipur GP revealed her satisfaction with the existing roads stating that she was happy with the earthen road in front of her household and all-weather roads nearby,⁷⁴ and that the experienced problem of muddy roads is an inevitable and understandable problem in villages (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 8/09/2010). Another villager stated that there was a *morum* road near her house and she doesn't expect anything more (higher order roads like brick or pitch roads) (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 19/09/2009). Some respondents, however, revealed higher expectations; for instance one subject said that the *morum* road near his house was quite good, but a pitch road would be even better (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 19/09/2009).

Most of the villager responses of Nowdapanur GP reflected negative perceptions of the condition of roads in the GP, pointing to problems such as water logging and muddiness in some villages, and dustiness or bumpy roads for others. Their responses indicate that the overall quality of roads in this GP is poorer compared to Debipur GP. One respondent expressed succinctly, "Roads are THE problem in this GP" (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). In this GP too, some subjects revealed their

⁷³The negative perceptions regarding road quality mainly came from respondents living in Mobarokpur and Punnyagram villages of this GP. The former is controlled by an opposition political party while the latter is controlled by the ruling CPI (M).

⁷⁴Rural roads can be of various categories: they can be classified into seasonal and all-weather roads. Earthen roads are seasonal roads (also called *kutchra* roads), whereas all-weather ones are of different types viz. *morum*, brick, pitch and cement-concrete.

higher expectations in terms of preference for up-gradation of road categories (for instance five subjects opined that the existing roads should be converted to pitch roads). One villager believed that just having all-weather roads was not a satisfactory solution: he felt that brick roads are worse than earthen roads because they are bumpy, and should be up-graded to pitch roads (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 5/01/2010).

While the two GPs could easily be compared with each other with respect to survey findings about satisfaction with roads, such comparison was not possible with respect to drinking water sources. This is because an overwhelming majority of the survey respondents of Debipur GP are dependent on public drinking water sources not provided by the GP, in spite of the fact that there are 226 GP-provided cylinder tube-wells⁷⁵ in the GP (according to the annual report of Debipur GP for 2008-09). Only one villager survey respondent mentioned dependence on tube-wells as a water source, while the remaining 15 respondents were dependent on 'time taps' for drinking water supply.⁷⁶ The construction and maintenance of time taps and the supply of water through them is done not by the GP but by the Public Health and Engineering Department of the Government of West Bengal.

In spite of the widespread availability of time taps (alongside tube-wells) and the convenience offered by them,⁷⁷ there were some persistent complaints expressed about drinking water sources by the Debipur GP villager survey respondents. Accessibility rather than quality seemed to be a bigger problem for the users of public drinking water sources. One respondent, for instance said that both the tube-well and

⁷⁵ Cylinder tube-wells can reach deeper down into the ground to tap ground water.

⁷⁶ Time taps are public taps providing piped water supply. While these are naturally more convenient to use than tube-wells, their water supply is not continuous. As implied by their name, water is supplied through these taps only during certain fixed time slots of the day.

⁷⁷ Eleven out of 16 villager survey respondents (68.75%) in Debipur GP expressed satisfaction with the quality of the public drinking water source. Eight out of the 16 respondents (50%) in Debipur GP expressed satisfaction with the accessibility of the public drinking water source.

the time tap were quite far from her house (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 12/09/2009). Even though Debipur GP has a large number of public drinking water supply points (tube well and time taps), the large size of this GP implies that even more such supply points are required to make life easier for the people of this GP. The GP is therefore partly responsible for the persisting accessibility problems with respect to drinking water supply in the backward pockets of this GP, which it can ameliorate by providing more tube-wells in these areas.

In Nowdapanur GP, most of the respondents were users of private (own or neighbour's) rather than GP provided public tube-wells. The dependence of only seven out of sixteen respondents on public (GP-provided) tube-wells implies that the coverage or accessibility of tube-wells is such that several villagers do not find a public tube-well within a reasonable distance near their homes and have to depend on their own or neighbour's private tube-wells. The result is that several villagers in this economically backward GP have to bear the financial burden of constructing a tube-well or have to borrow water from neighbours' tube-wells. As one respondent expressed, "I have to take water from my neighbour's tube-well because the GP tube-well is too far" (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 1/01/2010).⁷⁸ There is no provision of piped water or time taps in this GP, because of which tube-wells are the only drinking water source. Out of the seven users of GP tube-wells among the 16 villager survey respondents, five depend partially on GP tube-wells (usually during summer) and partially on private tube-wells. Fifty percent of the users of GP-provided tubewells among the villager survey

⁷⁸ An elected representative of Nowdapanur GP belonging to the ruling party INC also admitted that there are GP tube-wells provided, but many villagers find these to be located at an inconvenient distance from their house.

respondents in Nowdapanur GP expressed satisfaction with the accessibility of the GP tube-wells.⁷⁹

Out of the seven villager survey respondents of Nowdapanur GP who were dependent on GP tube-wells, four (57.1%) expressed satisfaction with the quality of the same. The users of GP tube-wells expressed varied opinions of the quality of the GP tube-wells. One user said that the water is sometimes good and sometimes of bad quality (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). Another user said that the water from the GP tube-well is 'not bad', but there is a water shortage in summer (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). One user pointed out that the GP tube-well needs repair (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010), while another pointed to the problem of crowds at the GP tube-well and damage to the tube-wells because of crowds (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010). The GP has provided some cylinder tube-wells which can reach deep into the ground and draw water even in the dry summer months. Repair of these cylinder tube-wells is, however, very expensive, and as a result several of these tube-wells are lying broken down in an unusable condition. The high dependence of villager survey respondents on private drinking water sources, together with the quality, accessibility and water shortage problems experienced by public tube-well users, point to the shortcomings in the coverage and quality of tube-wells provided by Nowdapanur GP.

⁷⁹Data for accessibility satisfaction was available for six out of seven users. Three users out of these six (50%) were satisfied with accessibility.

Overall Performance in the Area of Infrastructure

On the basis of various objective output-based measures, Debipur GP can be seen to have superior performance compared to Nowdapanur GP in implementing infrastructure development programmes and creating infrastructural assets.

The satisfaction level of the villager survey respondents of Debipur GP with respect to the quality of roads is also higher. The higher satisfaction level seen among Debipur GP villager survey respondents with respect to public drinking water sources, however, cannot form a basis for concluding the superior performance of Debipur GP. This is because such higher satisfaction level arises from the villagers' convenience in using taps provided by the Public Health and Engineering Department of the Government of West Bengal and is thus not reflective of GP performance. No valid comparison between the two GPs is therefore possible on the indicators of satisfaction for drinking water sources.

On the basis of the inter-GP comparison on the objective output based indicators and the perception-based indicator of satisfaction with roads, Debipur GP is inferred as having overall better performance in the functional area of infrastructure.

Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education

West Bengal's *Panchayat* law gives GPs the broad power to undertake measures for the promotion of primary education within its jurisdiction (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 19). The GP has been entrusted with a general responsibility to increase the enrolment of children in primary educational institutions and of ensuring that teaching and learning are progressing smoothly and classes are going on regularly in the primary educational institutions. However, its specific and concrete responsibility with

respect to primary education is to provide facilities (especially physical infrastructure) to primary educational institutions (Government of West Bengal 2008a).

Public primary schools in GPs are of two types: mainstream primary schools and alternative primary schools. While the GP has the duty to provide facilities to both these types of schools, its role with respect to the latter is more salient. Mainstream primary schools were not established by the GP or other tiers of *Panchayats*. Most of these schools were established much earlier and are usually already equipped with basic facilities. In contrast, alternative primary schools known as *Shishu Shiksha Kendras* (SSKs) have been set up more recently in areas which lack access to mainstream primary schools. GPs facilitate the process of setting up SSKs, but the actual approval of the decision to set up an SSK comes from the *Panchayat Samiti*. Most importantly, these nascent schools are often poorly equipped with facilities, and it is the duty of the GP to provide facilities to them.⁸⁰ The extent of availability of basic facilities such as building, enough classrooms, drinking water sources, toilets and boundary walls in SSKs therefore directly reflects the performance of the concerned GP.

Therefore GP performance in the functional area of alternative primary education is assessed in terms of the availability of basic facilities in the SSKs located in the GP's jurisdiction. There are four SSKs in Nowdapanur GP and two in Debipur GP. The author visited and studied two SSKs each in both Nowdapanur GP and Debipur GP—Debipur SSK and Punnyagram SSK in Debipur GP, and Srirampur SSK and Bejpara SSK in Nowdapanur GP. The situation in these four SSKs (situated in the two GPs), with respect to the availability of basic facilities, is summarized in Table 16 and elaborated below.

⁸⁰Since the GPs have negligible Own-Source Revenue, they use central and state government funds such as Twelfth Finance Commission and Untied Fund for the maintenance and construction of the physical infrastructure of SSKs. The rules of these programmes permit their use for maintenance /construction work for SSK facilities (Murshidabad *Zilla Parishad* 2009).

Table 16: Availability of Basic Facilities of Alternative Primary Schools (SSKs) in West Bengal GPs

Facility	Debipur GP		Nowdapanur GP	
	Debipur SSK	Punnyagram SSK	Srirampur SSK	Bejpara SSK
Own Building	yes	yes	no	yes
Classroom for each grade	yes	yes	no	no
Own drinking water source	yes	yes	no	no
Own toilet	yes	yes	no	Constructed, not yet usable
Boundary wall	no	no	no	no
Mid-day Meal kitchen	no	yes	no	yes

Source: Author's observation and teacher interviews

Possession of Own Building

Three out of the four SSKs studied in the two GPs had their own buildings at the time of fieldwork. The SSK lacking its own building was Srirampur SSK in Nowdapanur GP. The three SSKs that had their own buildings at the time of fieldwork (Debipur SSK and Punnyagram SSK in Debipur GP, and Bejpara SSK in Nowdapanur GP) did not have their own buildings when they were established. They were all set up in 2000 or 2001, and got their own buildings much later. Till then, these schools had to hold open air classes or share facilities with other educational centres such as *Anganwadi Kendras*. Punnyagram SSK got its own building two years after being set up, and Debipur SSK and Bejpara SSK got their own buildings six years and five years after their establishment respectively. Srirampur SSK lacked its own building even though it was established in 2000.⁸¹

⁸¹The author learnt from the head of the Education and Public Health committee of Nowdapanur GP that a reason behind Srirampur SSK lacking its building was the unavailability of land for constructing the building. No villager had voluntarily donated land for construction of the SSK building. Therefore land availability may be seen as an extraneous factor affecting GP performance in providing facilities to SSKs. Nevertheless, the GP cannot be absolved of its responsibility to provide infrastructure to SSKs in the

At the time of fieldwork in Nowdapanur GP (December 2009-January 2010), a new building for this SSK was under construction. The students and teachers of this SSK were seen undergoing extreme inconvenience because of having to hold classes in the open ground, in the verandah of the *Anganwadi Kendra* or in the GP member's residence.

Classroom-Grade Ratio

SSKs teach students of four grades, the primary grades of I to IV. The minimal expectation is that there will at least one classroom to accommodate each grade, that is, an SSK will have at least four classrooms. Both the SSKs in Debipur GP were seen to have four classrooms, but the situation was comparatively unfortunate in the selected SSKs of Nowdapanur GP. Srirampur SSK did not even have a building at the time of fieldwork, with classes being held in an open space, with the students of different grades appearing mixed up. Bejpara SSK was seen to have its own building, but with only two classrooms. The *Sahayikas* (teachers) of Bejpara SSK told the author that one grade was taught in the verandah, one had its own classroom, and two grades were accommodated in a single classroom by putting a partition to separate them (Author's field interview, dated 6/01/2010). The classrooms in SSKs buildings are quite small, therefore the space constraints and inconvenience emerging from putting two grades in a single classroom can only be imagined.

Toilets and Drinking Water Source

Apart from the availability of own building and enough classrooms, toilets and drinking water are the other most crucial and fundamental facilities required in any educational

absence of voluntary land donations. The GP could have taken pro-active steps to procure land on its own, instead of waiting for voluntary land donation.

institution. Both the SSKs in Debipur GP had their own toilets and drinking water sources. Bejpara SSK is the first SSK in Nowdapanur GP to get its own toilet; at the time of fieldwork, however, its toilet had yet to be painted and be ready for use. Srirampur SSK uses the toilet and tube-well of the adjacent *Anganwadi Kendra*, whereas Bejpara SSK uses a nearby public tube-well provided by the GP.⁸²

Other Facilities—Boundary Walls and Mid-Day Meal Kitchens

None of the four SSKs studied in the two GPs had their own boundary wall: this resulted in a major risk to the safety of the school children. Children have been found to run into the adjoining road which has vehicles plying (Debipur SSK), and there is a possibility of children falling into ponds surrounding the SSKs (in the case of Debipur SSK and Punnyagram SSK). The *Sahayikas* of Bejpara SSK also expressed their need for a boundary wall to prevent children from running here and there during school hours.

Mid-day meals are provided in SSKs under Government of India's Mid-day Meal Scheme in order to increase child enrolment and attendance in schools and increase students' nutritional levels. Mid-day meals served in schools are prepared by Self-Help Groups. Punnyagram SSK in Debipur GP and Bejpara SSK in Nowdapanur GP had their own kitchens in the school premises to prepare the meals, whereas Debipur SSK (Debipur GP) and Srirampur SSK (Nowdapanur GP) lacked such kitchens.

Teacher Perception of SSK Facilities and GP Support

The author spoke to the *Sahayikas* of the studied SSKs in order to gauge their perceptions regarding SSK facilities and their satisfaction with the support received

⁸²One *Sahayika* of Bejpara SSK told the author that the water coming from this tube-well was not suitable for drinking.

from the GP. The *Sahayikas* of all the four SSKs perceived the lack of certain important facilities for their respective SSKs. Table 17 shows the most urgent unfulfilled needs of the SSKs, as perceived by the *Sahayikas*. It can be seen that the SSK *Sahayikas* of Nowdapanur GP (especially of Srirampur SSK) perceive a lack of even more basic facilities, compared to the SSK *Sahayikas* of Debipur GP.

Table 17: Most Urgent Unfulfilled Needs of SSKs Perceived by Teachers

SSK name (with GP)	Urgent unfulfilled need
Debipur SSK (Debipur GP)	Boundary wall and mid-day meal kitchen
Punnyagram SSK (Debipur GP)	Boundary wall
Bejpara SSK (Nowdapanur GP)	Drinking water source and boundary wall
Srirampur SSK (Nowdapanur GP)	Building, drinking water source and toilet
Source: teacher interviews	

While the SSKs of Nowdapanur GP suffer from a more serious problem of facilities, its *Sahayikas* did not express dissatisfaction with the support received from the GP. In fact, the *Sahayikas* in Debipur GP expressed more critical views. While Srirampur SSK suffered from a serious lack of facilities, its teachers were actually grateful to the GP member of the area for allowing his house to be used for conducting classes and cooking mid-day meals during rainy weather, and expressed a positive perception of the GP's role (Author's field interview with *Sahayikas* of Srirampur SSK, dated 2/01/2010). The *Sahayikas* of Bejpara SSK also felt that the GP was extending enough support (Author's field interview, dated 6/01/2010).

The *Sahayikas* of Debipur SSK in Debipur GP complained that the GP had promised to provide the lacking facilities but had not yet fulfilled its promise. They also complained that the GP member representing the area where Debipur SSK is located fails to come for the Management Committee meeting of the school, even if called (Author's field interview, dated 10/09/2009). The Punnyagram SSK *Sahayikas* gave a

neutral response, only revealing that the GP had provided an assurance of supplying the missing facilities (Author's field interview, dated 5/10/2009). The patterns in the *Sahayika* responses show that dissatisfaction with GP support does not necessarily correspond to the actual severity of the problem of facilities.

Overall GP Performance in Alternative Primary Education

While the SSKs of Debipur GP lack certain basic facilities such as boundary walls (both SSKs) and Mid-day Meal kitchen (Debipur SSK), the SSKs of Nowdapanur GP are lacking in even more basic facilities such as own building, enough classrooms, toilets and drinking water. From the above account, it is quite clear that the SSKs of Debipur GP are superior to the ones in Nowdapanur GP, considering the four most basic infrastructural facilities of SSKs that GPs are responsible for providing – building, classrooms, drinking water and toilets.

The most glaring defect of Nowdapanur GP's performance in the area of alternative primary education is the lack of a building in one SSK, a fact that creates a chaotic learning environment and very likely adversely affects learning and teaching. The absence of the most basic facilities in its SSKs implies that Nowdapanur GP is clearly inferior to Debipur GP with respect to availability of SSK facilities, even though its *Sahayikas* feel satisfied with the support received from GP (though they do perceive a pressing need for unavailable facilities). It can be inferred, on the basis of these findings, that Debipur GP's overall performance in the functional area of alternative primary education is better than that of Nowdapanur GP.

Overall Performance Assessment for the GPs of West Bengal

As already seen, Debipur GP has performed better than Nowdapanur GP in the two functional areas of performance--infrastructure and alternative primary education. Debipur GP shows a clear superiority over Nowdapanur GP with respect to each functional area. In the functional area of infrastructure, Debipur GP performs better on objective output-based measures, and on people's satisfaction with infrastructural assets (roads). It also performs better on the functional area of alternative primary education because of the relatively superior facilities of its SSKs. Therefore Debipur GP is inferred as having higher aggregate performance than Nowdapanur GP.

Villagers' Assessment of Overall GP Performance

In the villager survey conducted by the author, the villager respondents in both GPs were asked to state their aggregate assessment of the performance of their respective GPs. In Debipur GP, no subject professed complete satisfaction⁸³, one subject professed being 'satisfied to a large extent' while having unfulfilled needs, nine respondents professed partial satisfaction, one professed complete dissatisfaction, and the remaining five had no opinion on the issue. In Nowdapanur GP, six subjects professed satisfaction, five subjects professed being not at all satisfied, and the remaining five said that they were partly satisfied. The existence of six 'satisfied' responses in Nowdapanur GP, compared to no such response for Debipur GP, appears to be a positive reflection on the GP's performance.

However, in actuality, the pattern of responses shows an association with the beneficiary status of respondents: for instance out of the six subjects who professed

⁸³It might be noted that four of the villager survey respondents in Debipur GP are members of the ruling party CPI (M), with one of these four being a professed die-hard loyalist of the party. It is significant that none of them express complete satisfaction with the GP's functioning, even in this CPI (M) dominated GP.

satisfaction with the GP's work in Nowdapanur GP, four respondents belonged to households receiving pension or IAY benefits, and made up all the IAY/pension beneficiaries among the respondents.⁸⁴ Three out of these four respondents belonging to beneficiary households had personally received pension benefits from the GP, whereas the remaining respondent's family had benefitted from IAY money, and his mother was the recipient of old age pension. There were only two beneficiaries in Debipur GP⁸⁵; both were IAY beneficiaries, and both professed only partial satisfaction, with one of these respondents possessing a persisting demand for old age pension for her mother in law.

The satisfaction levels among the respondents belonging to beneficiary households in Nowdapanur GP is higher, but this might be because three out of the four respondents belonging to beneficiary households had personally received pensions, and this personal experience appears to be shaping their satisfaction level. While villagers give importance to distribution of welfare benefits in assessing GP performance, it must be noted that GPs have very limited autonomy with respect to decision making on beneficiary-oriented programmes. Decision making for these programmes is governed by procedural stipulations such as BPL status, and is mainly the preserve of administrators in higher tiers of government. The role of GPs is to channelize applications to the higher administrative tiers.

As many as five subjects professed being not at all satisfied among the respondents of Nowpanur GP, compared to only one such response from the Debipur GP subjects. The reason given by one such Nowdapanur GP subject behind his total dissatisfaction was, "I did not get anything from the GP except for medicines for my

⁸⁴ Out of the remaining two who professed satisfaction, one was grateful because of the help that the GP has extended to the Self Help Group which she led and the other had not gained anything specific from the GP (apart from her son's NREGA employment, which is a statutory right and most villagers anyway receive).

⁸⁵ Beneficiaries' here refers only to recipients of pensions or IAY.

cows” (Author’s field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). Unfulfilled demands for various benefits, including IGNOAPS and/or IAY, were expressed by all the five subjects of Nowdapanur GP who professed total dissatisfaction.

Therefore villagers’ perception of the overall performance of their respective GP appears to be significantly shaped by whether or not they have received benefits of beneficiary-oriented programmes, as also revealed in the reasons expressed behind dissatisfaction. One subject in Nowdapanur GP, who professed partial satisfaction with overall GP performance elaborated that roads, in his opinion were good, but BPL (Below Poverty Line) related matters were not alright; a lot of undeserving people were getting benefits which rightfully belong to the poor (Author’s field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 5/01/2010).

In spite of the superior infrastructural output-based performance of Debipur GP and also the higher satisfaction of its respondents with respect to the quality of roads, it cannot be inferred from the pattern of survey responses that the overall satisfaction levels among the survey respondents of this GP are higher than those seen in Nowdapanur GP. The high proportion of ‘partially satisfied’ responses in Debipur GP indicate that villagers are perceiving that some of the needs and demands of their daily lives are being met through the activities of the GP, but they expect much more than what they are currently getting, especially individual benefits in areas such as pension programmes and IAY. Therefore, the low proportion of ‘satisfied’ responses in Debipur GP is possibly shaped, to an extent, by higher expectations. The proportion of respondents who are totally dissatisfied is much higher in Nowdapanur GP; this finding is consistent with the comparative inferior performance of this GP seen with respect to indicators such as infrastructural output-based measures and satisfaction with roads.

Performance of the Chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh

The performance of the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh—Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP—is evaluated in this section. For the sake of uniformity with the West Bengal study, such performance is assessed for the areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education, leading to an assessment of aggregate performance for the two GPs.

Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure

As per Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, GPs have the duty to construct and maintain infrastructural assets such as sources of water supply, drains, roads, streets and bridges (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2009a, Section 7).⁸⁶ Furthermore, GPs have been entrusted with the task of implementing central government infrastructural programmes such as NREGA and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, and state government programmes such as *Moolbhoot Yojana* (Basic Needs Programme). GPs have the task of implementing specific works under these programmes, choosing from among the works proposed by the *Gram Sabha* (see Chapter 5). In implementing these works, GPs are obligated to follow the rules of these government programmes, and adhere to a spending ceiling of INR 500,000 on any specific work.

The performance of the two chosen GPs in the area of infrastructure is assessed first using objective output-based measures and then on the basis of GP residents' satisfaction with infrastructural assets provided by the GP.

⁸⁶The law vests the power and duty of constructing infrastructural assets in the *Gram Sabha* (see Chapter 5). In actual practice, however, it is the GP that undertakes these tasks and exercises these powers.

Objective Output-based Measures

The infrastructural works of the selected GPs of Madhya Pradesh for the year 2008-09 were carried out under NREGA, Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, *Moolbhoot Yojana* and *Gaun Khanij Rashi* (Minor Mineral Royalties) Fund.⁸⁷ The physical output performance of the two GPs is detailed below, first for NREGA and then for other programmes.

The NREGA action plan (list of targeted works) of Goutampur Colony GP for 2008-09 had as many as 42 works but in reality only four NREGA works were taken up that year. GP records show that out of these four works taken up, only two works were completed, and the other works were not completed. Therefore half (50%) of the works taken up were completed in 2008-09. The two completed works were *med bandhan* (construction of boundaries of plots of land) works. Since only two out of 42 targeted NREGA works of Goutampur Colony GP were completed in 2008-09, its effectiveness ratio for NREGA works was 4.8%. The unfinished works of 2008-09 were not completed even in 2009-10, nor were any other assets created in 2009-10.

In Ramgarh GP, as per data from the GP office, thirteen well construction works were taken up in 2008-09 under NREGA. There is no available evidence of works completed in 2008-09 by this GP.⁸⁸ Evidence from the NREGA website however shows that several NREGA works were completed in Ramgarh GP in 2009-10: an approach road construction work and a culvert construction work (started in 2009-10), one public well construction (started in 2008-9) and seven personal wells. Combining the years 2008-09 and 2009-10, the performance of Ramgarh GP (the economically less developed GP) in creating infrastructural assets under NREGA was superior, even

⁸⁷ *Gaun Khanij Rashi* is an Own Source Revenue source for Madhya Pradesh GPs. The rules of the Government of Madhya Pradesh entrust GPs with control over the royalties obtained from minor minerals occurring in the GP area.

⁸⁸ The GP records do not state which of the works started in 2008-09 were completed in the same year. The NREGA website has no record of works completed in 2008-09.

though both GPs had unfinished works under NREGA. Table 18 shows the comparison between the two GPs with respect to completion of NREGA works, combining the years 2008-09 and 2009-10. Ramgarh GP was able to complete ten NREGA works while Goutampur Colony GP was able to complete only two works. The effectiveness ratio (ratio of completed works to targeted works) for Ramgarh GP could not be calculated because of lack of data on the number of targeted works.

Table 18: Completed and Unfinished NREGA Works (for 2008-09 and 2009-10 combined) in the Madhya Pradesh GPs

<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Completed works	Unfinished works
Goutampur Colony GP	Two <i>med bandhan</i> (construction of boundary of plots of land) works	One Gravel road construction and one pond deepening.
Ramgarh GP	Ten completed works – Approach road construction Culvert construction Public well construction Construction of 7 personal wells	Construction of one personal well

Source: Goutampur Colony GP records and Work Status Pages of NREGA website (Government of India 2009-10d)

Data on completed NREGA works for the financial year 2010-11 also reveal the superiority of Ramgarh GP with respect to completion of NREGA works. For the financial year 2010-11, Goutampur Colony GP was still facing problems regarding completion of NREGA works; the two unfinished works of 2009-10 were still ongoing in 2010-11, and no other work had been completed, as per data obtained from the GP Secretary in May 2011. In contrast to Goutampur GP which had not completed any

work, Ramgarh GP had completed four NREGA works and had at least two ongoing NREGA works in 2010-11 (Government of India 2010-11b).⁸⁹

The progress of NREGA works is dependent to an extent on the willingness of villager beneficiaries to do labour work. The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP lamented that NREGA works started long back in his GP are still lying unfinished because of the unavailability of labour (Author's telephonic interview, dated 13/05/2010). The Secretary of Ramgarh GP however said that the demand for work in his GP was quite high, and there was no problem of labour availability for NREGA works. However, he said that the GP did take care to take up NREGA projects during the seasons when the villagers actually have a demand for employment, and are not preoccupied with doing agriculture work on their own plots of land (Author's telephonic interview, dated 13/05/2010).

Apart from NREGA, infrastructural works in the two GPs were also done under other infrastructural programmes. Both GPs completed infrastructural works under Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, *Moolbhoot Yojana*, and the *Gaun Khanij Rashi*. In addition, Goutampur Colony GP also completed works under a programme known as *Adivasi Upayojana*, a state-government programme for the development of infrastructure in areas with concentration of tribal population.

Table 19 shows the works completed by the two GPs under infrastructural programmes other than NREGA. However, it is not possible to compare the effectiveness of the outputs of the two GPs for these programmes due to the absence of baseline data about the targeted number of works. The ratio of complete works to incomplete works for both GPs also cannot be compared due to the lack of required

⁸⁹The exact number of ongoing works in Ramgarh GP for the year 2010-11 is not known, since the details of the ongoing works for 2010-11 in the NREGA website only show the works that are currently ongoing (as of August 2012). Two such works are earlier works i.e. started in 2007-8 and 2010-11, and therefore can be considered to be ongoing works for 2010-11. Readers must note that there might have been more ongoing works in Ramgarh GP in 2010-11.

data. Therefore no conclusive comparison can be made as to which GP is superior and which is inferior with respect to objective output-based indicators for infrastructural programmes other than NREGA. Table 19 however shows that Goutampur Colony GP was able to implement higher order infrastructural works (such as cement concrete road construction) compared to Ramgarh GP. This difference possibly has a bearing on the differences between the two GPs as far the degree of popular satisfaction with roads is concerned.

Table 19: Infrastructural Works Done Under Programmes other than NREGA in the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09)

Works Completed	
Goutampur Colony GP	Ramgarh GP
1) Three Road repair works (Goutampur Colony village, Jondra and Kesalwada).	1) Two tube-well sinking works.
2) Two Cement-concrete road construction works (Jondra and Goutampur Colony village).	2) Filling of hole in road.
3) Pond deepening in Kesalwada.	3) Five road repair works.
4) Various tube-well repair works.	4) Three works of conversion of seasonal roads into <i>Morum</i> roads (Ramgarh and Neenaur villages).
	5) <i>Sokhta gaddha</i> (recharging of water supply) work next to a tube-well in a SC locality.

Source: Data from records of both GPs

Villager Satisfaction and Need Fulfilment

The author interviewed sixteen villagers in each of the two selected GPs in Madhya Pradesh, to assess the extent of villagers' satisfaction with basic infrastructural assets provided by the GP. Perception-based insights obtained from the villager survey interviews are essential for evaluating the performance of the selected GPs in the area of infrastructure provision, since objective measures convey an incomplete picture of the actual quality and usefulness of the assets created. The author obtained villagers' opinions with respect to their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the quality of roads,

quality of drinking water sources and accessibility of drinking water sources. These opinions are detailed below. Table 20 provides a summary of the extent of the satisfaction of villager survey respondents with the infrastructural assets provided by the GP.

Table 20: Villager Satisfaction with GP-provided Infrastructural Assets in the Madhya Pradesh GPs

Satisfaction Indicator	Proportion of villager survey respondents satisfied	
	Goutampur Colony GP	Ramgarh GP
Quality of roads	6.25%	0%
Quality of drinking water sources	71.4%	33.3%
Accessibility of drinking water source	64.3%	31.25%

Source: Villager survey interviews conducted in the two GPs

The author, through her own visits, observed that Goutampur Colony GP is well connected to the block headquarters through an all-weather road. The problem however lies with the quality of the roads that lie within the villages, and also the poor quality of the road connecting two constituent settlements of this GP viz. Goutampur Colony village and Goutampur Tola hamlet.⁹⁰ The villagers, as the frequent users of village roads, are best equipped to assess them, and their views are as follows: As many as fourteen villager survey respondents of Goutampur Colony GP were not satisfied with the quality of village roads, only one respondent was satisfied (6.25%), and one expressed partial satisfaction. In Ramgarh GP, all sixteen respondents professed dissatisfaction with the quality of village roads. The author too noticed the extremely poor quality of village roads in Ramgarh GP, along with a severe connectivity problem as far as travelling between the constituent villages of the GP is concerned.

⁹⁰The connectivity between Goutampur Colony village and Jondra hamlet is quite good because of the presence of a recently constructed cement concrete road.

Open-ended responses from the villager survey interviews carried out in both GPs shed light on the major problems experienced by the villagers with respect to roads. The major problem that became apparent from Goutampur Colony GP's villager survey responses is the inconvenience of muddy roads, especially during the rainy season. One subject from Kesalwada village of the GP (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010), and another from Goutampur Colony village (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010) mentioned that there is a problem of flooding and water logging in the roads. One resident of Goutampur Tola hamlet complained about the difficulty experienced by children in reaching the school located in this hamlet, because of the submerging of the road during the rainy season (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). Some villagers also pointed to the problem of dusty roads. However, the lone respondent who expressed satisfaction with the roads of Goutampur Colony GP had this to say, "There are some holes in the roads, but the roads are now better than before. Earlier one couldn't even walk or use vehicles on the roads" (Author's field interview with male, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). The village resident who expressed partial satisfaction was satisfied with the connectivity of the GP and its villages, but expressed the need for repair of some roads (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010).

The level of unhappiness with roads was even higher in Ramgarh GP, with not a single respondent expressing satisfaction (or even partial satisfaction). Here the problem is not just muddiness during the rains, but of uneven roads that are full of holes and barely motorable. One villager remarked that it is not possible to travel from one

village of the GP to another, especially during the rainy season (Author's field interview with male, OBC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010). Another villager commented that roads of the village are extremely poor, and especially horrible during the rains because of the added problem of muddiness. Author's field interview with female, general category (*Rajput*) villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). The backwardness of the villages of this GP seems to be connected to their poor connectivity, and one villager summed up the problem saying, "If our roads improve then life will improve" (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

The village residents of Goutampur Colony are dependent on tube-wells for their drinking water needs, with fourteen out of sixteen villager survey respondents dependent on public (GP-provided) tube-wells, and two subjects dependent on their private tube-wells. The satisfaction levels with the tube-wells were much higher compared to the satisfaction levels for village roads. Ten out of the 14 users of public tube-wells (71.4%) in Goutampur Colony GP professed satisfaction with the quality of the tube-wells. In Ramgarh GP, the villagers were dependent on wells and tube-wells, and here the satisfaction levels were lower than in Goutampur Colony GP (but better compared to the satisfaction with road quality in the same GP). Five users of the GP-provided water sources (wells and tube-wells), out of a total of fifteen (33.3%), professed satisfaction with their quality.⁹¹

The satisfaction levels with respect to accessibility of drinking water sources were as follows. Nine out of the fourteen public tube-well users in Goutampur Colony GP (64.3%) were satisfied and five dissatisfied with their accessibility. In Ramgarh GP, five out of the sixteen users of public drinking water sources (31.25%) were satisfied

⁹¹Data was available only for 15 out of 16 villager survey subjects in Ramgarh GP with respect to quality satisfaction. Data was missing for one subject.

(and one partially satisfied) with their accessibility, with ten respondents professing dissatisfaction. Therefore both the quality satisfaction and accessibility satisfaction with public drinking water sources were much higher in Goutampur Colony GP than in Ramgarh GP.

Some villager survey respondents in Goutampur Colony GP praised the public tube-wells provided in their respective villages. Two respondents pointed to frequent repairs done on them (Author's field interview with male, SC and male ST villager survey respondents of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010 and 22/03/2010 respectively), while a Kesalwada resident said that the public tube-well near her house was new and working properly (Author's field interview with female, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 23/03/2010). One Jondra resident also commented that the water coming from the tube-well was of very good quality (Author's field interview with male, ST villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010). While the majority assessment of public drinking water sources was positive in Goutampur Colony GP, there were complaints raised by some respondents. One problem expressed was the water shortage during the summer; a Goutampur Tola resident, for instance, said that her neighbourhood needs one more tube-well because of the increased demand for water during summer (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 22/03/2010).

Quality and accessibility concerns about drinking water sources were expressed by several respondents of Ramgarh GP. The complaints were about wells and tube-wells. One resident of Bawdikheda village stated, "There is a huge water problem in this village: the hand-pump (tube-well) has dried up and the well is very far" (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP,

dated 5/04/2010). For another respondent, the problem was of lots of dry wells and the tube-well giving dirty water (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). In fact, it is probably due to the lack of sufficient number of tube-wells, and the problems in the functioning of tube-wells, that residents have to bear the inconvenience of drawing water from wells. Accessibility concerns were elaborated, such as by one respondent who said that the public well near his house is dry, because of which he has to bring water from a well located 1.5 km away from his house (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). The need for more tube-wells is also apparent from some responses that pointed to huge crowds, and even fights over water, at public tube-wells. Some respondents also complained that the tube-wells often break down and repair is delayed.

Overall Performance in the Area of Infrastructure

The contrast between the performance of Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP in the area of infrastructure is marked as far as the satisfaction of the surveyed villagers with the quality and accessibility of a key infrastructural asset, drinking water sources, is concerned. The levels of dissatisfaction with respect to roads are very high in both GPs and the contrast between them is less marked, with the dissatisfaction levels being even higher in Ramgarh GP compared to Goutampur Colony GP. Ramgarh GP is the only one among the four GPs covered in this study where all villager survey respondents have expressed dissatisfaction with respect to an aspect of GP performance (as seen in the case of roads for Ramgarh GP). However, the objective data on the outputs of infrastructural development programmes does not indicate the superiority of Goutampur Colony GP unlike the villager satisfaction data.

With respect to NREGA, it is clear that Ramgarh GP has shown greater success in completing infrastructural assets taken up for construction, while Goutampur Colony is struggling with unfinished infrastructural projects. Because of the absence of required data, it was not possible to detect performance variation between the two GPs using objective output-based indicators (such as effectiveness ratio or rate of completion of works taken up) for infrastructural programmes other than NREGA. Since valid comparison on objective output-based indicators was possible only with respect to NREGA works, the GP that performed better on NREGA works—Ramgarh GP— is inferred as having superior output-based performance.

One GP is therefore superior on villager satisfaction with infrastructural assets (Goutampur Colony GP) while a different GP is superior on objective output-based measures (Ramgarh GP). Which GP then should be assessed as having superior performance in the area of infrastructural performance? Given that Goutampur Colony GP shows superiority on the crucial sub-dimension of villager satisfaction (with marked superiority on the indicators of satisfaction with drinking water sources), it is inferred as having overall higher performance in this functional area.⁹²

Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education

Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) schools were set up as alternative primary schools in Madhya Pradesh. EGS schools are more nascent compared to mainstream primary schools. GPs facilitated the setting up of these schools in areas which lacked access to mainstream primary schools. GPs have the specific responsibility of providing facilities

⁹² It has been stated in the methodology of this study (Chapter 3) that crucial indicators/sub-dimensions are used as a basis for detecting variation in performance in the event of different GPs doing better on different sub-dimensions/indicators within a single dimension of performance.

to these schools.⁹³ The extent of availability of basic facilities in EGS schools is therefore an appropriate basis for assessing and comparing the performance of the two chosen GPs.

There are two EGS schools in Goutampur Colony GP (Goutampur Tola EGS and Kesalwada EGS) and one in Ramgarh GP (Bawdikheda EGS). GP performance in the area of alternative primary education is assessed below, according to indicators pertaining to the availability of various basic facilities in these EGS schools, using information obtained from teacher interviews and school visits. Table 21 summarizes the situation regarding availability of basic facilities in the EGS schools located in the two GPs.

Table 21: Availability of Basic Facilities of Alternative Primary (EGS) Schools in Madhya Pradesh GPs

GP	Goutampur Colony		Ramgarh
EGS	Goutampur Tola	Kesalwada	Bawdikheda
Own Building	yes	yes	yes
Classroom for each grade	no	no	no
Drinking water source	functional	functional	not functional
Toilet	no	incomplete construction	available, but not functional
Boundary Wall	no	barbed wire fencing	no
Mid Day Meal Kitchen shed	yes	yes	no

Source: teacher interviews and the author's observation during school visits

Building and Classrooms

All the EGS schools located in the two GPs have their own building. The EGS schools hold classes for grade I to grade V. None of the EGS schools in the two GPs have separate classrooms for all their grades, and neither is a shift system applied for holding

⁹³GPs in Madhya Pradesh can use central and state government infrastructural funds (such as *Moolbhoot Yojana* funds) to construct and maintain EGS facilities (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2008-09).

classes. In Goutampur Tola EGS of Goutampur Colony GP, there are two classrooms. A teacher of this school told the author that one classroom is used for holding classes for grade I, II and III and the other is used for holding classes for grade IV and V. In Kesalwada EGS of the same GP, the situation is slightly better since the school building has three classrooms: grade I and II are taught in one, grade III in one and grade IV and V in the remaining classroom. In Bawdikheda EGS of Ramgarh GP, too, two classrooms are used to accommodate five grades (Author's field interviews with teachers of Goutampur Tola, Kesalwada, and Bawdikheda EGS, dated 25/03/2010, 28/03/2010 and 5/04/2010 respectively).⁹⁴ Multi-grade pedagogy is employed by the teachers of the three EGS schools to simultaneously instruct children from two or more grades in a single classroom.

Toilets and Drinking Water Source

None of the three EGS schools located in the two GPs had functional toilets at the time of fieldwork. The toilet in Goutampur Tola EGS had not yet been constructed, while the toilet in Kesalwada EGS was in a state of incomplete construction. Bawdikheda EGS had a toilet which had no ceiling and only one wall, and (according to the teacher) was completely unsuitable for use. Drinking water, however, was a problem only for Bawdikheda EGS. At the time of fieldwork Bawdikheda EGS's tube-well was not working, and according to the teacher, the problem had been reported but the GP had done nothing to solve the problem (Author's field interview with teacher of Bawdikheda EGS, dated 5/04/2010). The two EGS schools of Goutampur Colony GP had functional tube-wells for drinking water supply.

⁹⁴The author could not observe the functioning (holding of classes) of any of the EGS schools. Goutampur Tola and Bawdikheda EGS were closed on the visit days, even though the visit days were weekdays. The teachers of these schools were interviewed in their residences. Only Kesalwada EGS was open, but classes were not being held because the term had come to an end and teachers were involved in grading exam papers and preparing mark lists.

Other Facilities–Boundary Wall and Kitchen Shed

None of the EGS schools in the two GPs had their own boundary walls. The Goutampur Tola *Guruji* (teacher) said that the boundary wall had not yet been constructed, even though the *Gram Sabha* resolution for its construction had been passed. The teacher of Bawdikheda EGS expressed an urgent demand for a boundary wall, but he was afraid that the construction of the wall and consequent demarcation of the school's land might create a conflict with the neighbouring land-owning villagers (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010). For the teacher of Kesalwada EGS, however, the absence of a boundary wall was not a major problem, because he felt that the barbed wire fencing was serving the purpose of a boundary wall (Author's field interview, dated 28/03/2010). The two EGS schools of Goutampur Colony had their own kitchen shed for preparing mid-day meals, while Bawdikheda EGS lacked a kitchen shed.

Teacher Perception of EGS School Facilities and GP Support

The teachers of all three EGS schools perceived the lack of certain important facilities and an urgent need for these facilities to be provided by the GP (see Table 22). The teachers of Goutampur Tola EGS and Bawdikheda EGS complained that they were not getting enough support from their respective GPs (Goutampur Colony GP for the former and Ramgarh GP for the latter), as evident in the non-availability of essential infrastructure (Author's field interviews with teachers of Goutampur Tola and Bawdikheda EGS, dated 25/03/2010 and 5/04/2010 respectively). The teacher of Kesalwada EGS, however, felt that support was forthcoming from the GP (Goutampur Colony GP), as evident, for instance, from the GP's ready repairing of the tube-well whenever it stops working (Author's field interview, dated 28/03/2010). Therefore the

EGS teachers of Goutampur Colony GP showed a mixed assessment of support provided by the GP, while the EGS teacher of Ramgarh GP showed a negative assessment of the GP in this respect.

Table 22: Most Urgent Unfulfilled Needs of EGS Schools Perceived by Teachers

EGS school	Urgent unfulfilled needs
Goutampur Tola EGS	Toilet, boundary wall, and keeping the school clean.
Kesalwada EGS	Functional toilet.
Bawdikheda EGS	Functional toilet, boundary wall, functional tube-well and kitchen shed.

Source: Teacher interviews

Overall Performance in Alternative Primary Education

While all three EGS schools have poor facilities—in terms of the lack of functional toilets, boundary walls and enough classrooms--the sole EGS of Ramgarh GP (Bawdikheda EGS) seems to be in an especially disadvantageous position as far as the availability of basic facilities is concerned. Both the EGS schools of Goutampur Colony GP had functional tube-wells; therefore neither of them lacked both functional drinking water sources and functional toilets. However Bawdikheda EGS in Ramgarh GP lacked both at the time of fieldwork. Moreover, both the EGS schools in Goutampur Colony GP had their own kitchen sheds to cook mid-day meals, while this was not available in Bawdikheda EGS. As stated earlier, the extent of availability of basic facilities in alternative primary schools is a direct reflection of GP performance. Based on this dimension, Ramgarh GP is inferior in its performance compared to Goutampur Colony GP in the functional area of alternative primary education.

Overall Performance Assessment for the GPs of Madhya Pradesh

It has been seen that Goutampur Colony GP has performed better than Ramgarh GP in the functional area of alternative primary education because of the relatively better availability of facilities in its alternative primary schools. It also has better overall performance in the functional area of infrastructure by virtue of higher villager satisfaction with infrastructural assets (though its performance on objective output-based measures is worse than that of Ramgarh GP). Because of its relative superiority on both the functional areas of performance, Goutampur Colony GP is inferred as having higher aggregate performance compared to Ramgarh GP.

Villagers' Assessment of Overall GP Performance

Villager survey respondents in both Madhya Pradesh GPs were asked to subjectively evaluate overall GP performance. There is a clear contrast in the aggregate satisfaction levels between the villager survey results of the two GPs. In Goutampur Colony GP, four respondents (25%) professed satisfaction with GP performance, nine professed partial satisfaction (56.25%) and three expressed being not at all satisfied (18.75%). In Ramgarh GP, the high level of aggregate dissatisfaction among the survey respondents is noteworthy: as many as 12 respondents (75%) professed dissatisfaction with GP performance. Two subjects expressed satisfaction (12.5%) and the same number expressed partial satisfaction (12.5%).

An association between beneficiary status and satisfaction of the survey respondents of Madhya Pradesh GPs with GP performance is seen. As in the West Bengal study, personal receipt of benefits shows an association with satisfaction levels. Among the two respondents in Goutampur Colony GP who personally received

pensions, one was satisfied and one was partially satisfied,⁹⁵ and none was dissatisfied. The only respondent in Ramgarh GP to personally receive a pension was satisfied with GP performance. A female IGNOAPS beneficiary of Goutampur Colony GP professed her obtaining of pension as the reason behind her satisfaction with GP performance (Author's interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). The recipient of widow pension (and also IAY money) in Ramgarh GP professed satisfaction with GP performance because she had got all that she wanted (Author's interview with female, OBC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010).

The reasons stated by the respondents behind their perceived satisfaction levels (revealing insights on the factors that affect their judgment of GP performance) show that their assessment of performance is not completely based on whether or not they have received benefits such as pensions from the GP. A respondent in Goutampur Colony GP, who professed satisfaction, stated that he was happy because roads and hand-pumps had been constructed. He did however have unfulfilled demands (for IAY and cheap rations) and suggested that the GP should meet unfulfilled needs (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). Another respondent of the same GP, whose family members had received IGNOAPS and widow pension money, complained that he was not at all satisfied, because of the GP's failure to provide the amenities and benefits that it should have provided; this subject's application for National Family Benefit Scheme (made after his father's death) had not been responded to, and he felt that there was an urgent need for proper roads and drainage in the GP (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010).

⁹⁵ The partially satisfied beneficiary was personally receiving old age (IGNOAPS) pensions, but at the time of the interview complained that pension money had not arrived for the last four months.

The infrastructural problems in the Madhya Pradesh GPs have also given importance, in addition to beneficiary issues, by the respondents in their stated reasons behind their aggregate assessment of performance. A resident of Goutampur Colony GP who professed partial satisfaction suggested that the most important thing that the GP should provide is assured water supply (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). In Ramgarh GP, a subject stated that he was not at all satisfied because nothing at all had been done for her village (Bawdikheda); roads and water supply were among the biggest problems being faced by the villagers (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010). Another Ramgarh GP respondent was partially satisfied because some work on constructing roads had been done recently, but a lot more remained to be done (Author's field interview with male, OBC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010). Two respondents of Ramgarh GP were not at all satisfied with the GP they had for the last five years, but expressed high hopes from the newly elected GP. One respondent professed being totally dissatisfied simply because he never got any benefits from the GP (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010); in contrast another resident, who expressed partial satisfaction, felt that it was not possible for the GP to satisfy everyone, given that it already had a lot of pressure on it (Author's field interview with female, general category survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 3/04/2010). One respondent, in his assessment of aggregate performance said that there was too much *chakkarbazi* (self- interested behaviour) and no work done by the GP at all (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

Conclusion

On the basis of the two comparative studies of GP performance set in the states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, Debipur GP in West Bengal and Goutampur Colony GP in Madhya Pradesh are found to be superior to their compared cases in performance. Now the question arises—what explains the superior performance of Debipur GP compared to Nowdapanur GP and of Goutampur Colony GP compared to Ramgarh GP? How important is accountability in explaining differences in performance? The coming chapters will explore these questions.

CHAPTER 7

EXAMINING THE ACCOUNTABILITY-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP FOR THE WEST BENGAL STUDY

This thesis has already elaborated the state of accountability and performance in the two chosen GPs in West Bengal. The aim of this chapter is to arrive at inferences about the accountability-performance relationship, considering not only the variation in the levels of accountability and performance between the two GPs, but also the evidence of actual causal impact (through the operation of causal processes) between the two variables.

The first section of this chapter examines the impact of accountability on performance, aiming to discover if accountability does indeed have a significant impact on performance in the chosen GPs. The second section of this chapter examines the impact of performance determinants other than accountability. The concluding section infers which among the possible primary determinants of performance – accountability, finances or capacity, actually explains variation in performance between the two GPs, and makes final comments on the accountability-performance relationship for the West Bengal study.

The Impact of Accountability on Performance

The impact of accountability on performance is examined in this section. Such impact is assessed firstly by looking at the impact of each accountability dimension on performance. Secondly, the relationship between accountability and GP performance in each functional area (infrastructure/alternative primary education) is explored. Finally, the overall relationship between accountability and performance is inferred, on the basis

of the overall results of the inter-GP comparison and the evidence of the impact of each accountability dimension on performance.

Impact of Different Accountability Dimensions on Performance

Accountability, as operationalized in this study has three dimensions—sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring. Each dimension has been assessed in terms of the effectiveness of its corresponding accountability mechanism, as seen in Chapter 4. The impact of each accountability dimension and its corresponding accountability mechanism on performance is assessed below.

Sanctioning Dimension and Performance

The sanctioning dimension of accountability has been assessed mainly in terms of the competitiveness of GP elections. A core difference between the two chosen West Bengal GPs is the highly competitive elections in one (Nowdapanur GP) compared to the heavy dominance of the ruling party in the other (Debipur GP). The former therefore did better on the sanctioning dimension of accountability than the latter. It should be seen, however, whether the higher electoral competition in Nowdapanur GP is having a positive impact on GP performance. The actual operation of the causal processes between electoral competition and performance in the chosen GPs is assessed below, according to the yardstick of the hypotheses (derived from the literature) given in Chapter 1.

The primary hypothesis about the impact of electoral competition on performance is that higher electoral competition can improve GP performance through the increased opportunity to sanction (punish) incumbent representatives. A high degree of electoral defeat of incumbents who contest re-elections would compel sitting

individual representatives to increase their efforts towards improving GP performance. For this hypothesis to be fulfilled, three conditions have to be met: firstly, incumbent representatives must seek re-election; secondly, there must be a fairly high degree of defeat of incumbent representatives contesting re-election; thirdly, voters must evaluate the incumbents contesting re-election on performance grounds, and bring about the defeat of those incumbents whose contributions to GP performance are not satisfactory.

In Debipur GP, it was seen that only one incumbent contested re-election in the 2008 elections and was successfully re-elected (see Chapter 4). In Nowdapanur GP, six incumbents contested re-election in the 2008 election. Two out of these six incumbents who contested re-election in Nowdapanur GP lost. Though there was a degree of turnover through electoral defeat, the degree of such turnover was not high. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the experienced electoral defeat of incumbents had any significant impact on the performance of Nowdapanur GP. This is because, in reality, non-performance considerations such as kinship and money power play a key role in influencing the re-election of incumbent representatives of this GP.

The author learnt from a member of this GP (belonging to the ruling INC) about the re-election of most incumbents being based on non-performance considerations. One GP member (also belonging to INC) who was re-elected in 2008 spent a lot of money in influencing voters during the campaign period. Apparently, the practice of 'buying' of votes of undecided voters (such as those who have no fixed loyalty to a political party) through gifts is prevalent in this GP. Another factor that operates in GP elections is kinship. One female member belonging to the INC was successfully re-elected because over a hundred of her relatives and members of her extended family voted for her (Author's telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to ruling party INC, dated 19/05/2010). Both these re-elected members

mentioned above also happen to hold key decision making positions in the GP. Another member of Nowdapanur GP (also belonging to INC) who was re-elected, heads an *Upa-samiti*⁹⁶ of the GP, but rarely attends the GP office or takes an interest in the functioning of the *Upa-samiti*, choosing to focus only on the interests and problems of the village constituency that he represents.⁹⁷

It can be seen from the above account that elections, though the only available sanctioning mechanism available to the people, are hardly, in practice bringing about sanctioning of incumbents on performance grounds. Because of this, elections are not creating a concrete threat of removal in the minds of incumbents who wish to contest the next elections. This, along with the fact that only a narrow pool of incumbents choose, or are able to, contest re-elections, weakens the compulsion or pressure on incumbents to contribute to GP performance to their best ability.

The second hypothesis about the impact of competitive elections on performance is that, they enable the selection of competent, responsible election candidates as representatives, and rejection of incompetent candidates. In other words, this hypothesis states that only competent candidates can pass the test of competitive elections. As per this hypothesis, competitive elections can improve GP performance even if incumbent representatives do not contest re-election. The candidates selected as representatives in any single election, who are supposed to be competent, skilled and able, in turn use their talents to contribute well to GP decision making and management of implementation, thus improving GP performance.

⁹⁶*Upa-samitis* are committees of the GP in particular functional areas.

⁹⁷The concerned GP member was praised by the alternative primary school teachers of his village for allowing his house to be used for holding classes of the school on rainy days. While it is part of a GP member's duty to cater to the problems of his/her constituency, this is not the only component of his/her overall responsibility. This is especially relevant to key office holders such as committee heads, who have an obligation to actively contribute to the functioning of the concerned committee and the entire GP.

In reality, however, a higher degree of electoral competition is rarely resulting in the selection of good quality, committed candidates as representatives in Nowdapanur GP. Nowdapanur GP suffers from the problem of low enthusiasm and involvement of most of its members who hardly come to the GP office (including three out of the five heads of *Upa-samitis*). Therefore higher competitiveness of elections is not leading to the election of better quality leaders in this GP, compared to Debipur GP. This may also be attributed to the prevalence of voting considerations such as kinship, money power and promises of individual, clientelistic benefits to voters, over considerations such as talent, commitment and skill. An elected member of Nowdapanur GP, belonging to the ruling party INC, shed light on the kind of considerations that shape voting in his GP:

Clientelism is greatly prevalent; beneficiaries never forget that so-and so member personally helped them. So is kinship: candidates win when large network of relatives vote for them. Caste-based and community-based factors do not play a very important role, with the exception of Soluadanga constituency, where candidates representing the Muslim league (which stands for orthodox Islam) win Muslim votes. Development work and assistance given to needy members occasionally makes a difference; for example one particular senior member of this GP is able to elicit block-level NREGA works for his constituency because the chairperson of the *Panchayat Samiti* belongs to his village. The present *Pradhan* may also have helped needy or sick persons in his constituency in some way. Personality based factors also play a role. For example, I won against my opponent even though my opponent was an employed person; possibly it was my opponent's reputation of being selfish and rude that was responsible for his defeat. Money power is an important factor determining voting; a former *Pradhan* of this GP is a rich person who spent a lot of money to win votes, for instance, by installing a tube-well for a voter who wanted it. A current member of this GP, belonging to our party, spent INR

80,000 to get elected, including INR 30,000 from his own pocket. I was sure on winning my seat. The residents of a particular SC locality of my constituency showed a liking for me and voted for me. The votes from this locality were the ‘balance votes’ that decided the outcome of the contest for my seat. The votes were almost equally split in favour of me and against me, so the votes of the SC locality were decisive. I would spend a lot of time in this locality before the elections (Author’s telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to ruling party INC, dated 19/05/2010).

The third hypothesis about the impact of electoral competition on performance is that electoral competition brings about a numerically significant and assertive opposition, which in turn can keep the ruling party alert to its shortcomings and pressurize it continuously, thus improving GP performance. Such oversight of the ruling party by the opposition group can take forms such as detection of corruption and wrongdoings, and detection and drawing of attention to performance failures. Both GPs have opposition groups, with Debipur GP having a smaller opposition (only 15% of the strength of the GP) and Nowdapanur GP being characterized by a numerically much larger opposition (about 43% of the GP’s strength). Whether the higher numerical strength of the opposition in Nowdapanur GP is leading to its greater effectiveness and assertiveness in actual practice, is assessed below.

One indicator of the influence of the opposition in a GP would be whether the opposition view that is expressed against GP decisions is recorded in the GP meeting registers. For both the GPs, however, (including Nowdapanur GP, which has a larger opposition), there was mention only of decisions adopted with consensus and no mention of any opposition view. The former *Pradhan* of Nowdapanur GP, who is currently a member of the opposition, commented that “the opposition exists only on paper in this GP. There is no real opposition. The opposition does not press for the

recording of opposing views during the GP meeting” (Author’s field interview, dated 5/01/2010).

An opposition member of Debipur GP (belonging to the AITC) complained that he no longer comes to know what is written in the minutes register, and consensus is recorded without the information and assent of the opposition representatives (Author’s field interview, dated 8/10/2009). However, it might be noted that GP registers are available in the GP office, and nothing stops the opposition members from going to the GP office and asking to see the registers. Another opposition GP member of Debipur GP, also from AITC, expressed a different view: he said that while differences of views do exist, these are resolved through discussion, and ultimately consensus is achieved (Author’s field interview, dated 17/09/2009). While there might be hue and cry raised by opposition members in GP general body meetings,⁹⁸ there is no sustained or clear pressure from these members on the *Pradhan* or the ruling party members to record opposition views.

An effective and assertive opposition is one that speaks up against and draws attention to wrongdoings, irregularities and shortcomings on the ruling group’s part. In actual practice, the opposition sometimes becomes aware of irregularities; for instance a current opposition member spoke of the retention of corrupt contractors linked to the ruling party INC (Author’s field interview, dated 5/01/2010). Yet just being aware of irregularities is one thing, but taking action to correct them is an entirely different matter. There is no evidence of any concrete effort by the opposition party members in Nowdapanur GP or Debipur GP to crusade, or even speak up, against corruption.

The opposition GP members do keep a watch on the treatment accorded to their respective constituencies by the ruling party, and adopt an approach of persuasion and

⁹⁸While the author did not attend the general body meetings of the two GPs out of respect for the confidentiality of their proceedings, she was present in the GP office during one such meeting in Nowdapanur GP, and could clearly hear the shouting and noise going on.

compromise to obtain (a part of) the funds or development works that they demand for these areas, instead of whistle blowing or registering of protest.⁹⁹ Even in this respect, the numerically larger opposition of Nowdapanur GP does not show greater success. The NREGA output data for Debipur GP show that there was comparatively fairer representation of opposition constituencies among all the constituencies in which NREGA infrastructural works were carried out. In Nowdapanur GP, the representation of opposition area works among all NREGA works done is however far less than proportionate.¹⁰⁰ This shows that a larger opposition does not necessarily lead to a much higher proportion of development gains to opposition areas.

Given the limited assertiveness of the opposition groups in both GPs—including Nowdapanur GP which has a numerically much larger opposition—it does not appear that the opposition is playing a significant role in correcting the performance failures of the GP and significantly improving GP performance. The three hypotheses that propose positive impacts of electoral competition on local government performance therefore fail to be empirically borne out in the West Bengal GPs covered in this study. This means that there is no evidence of causal processes operating between the sanctioning dimension of accountability and GP performance.

The assessment of causal processes between the sanctioning dimension of accountability and performance, as elaborated above, was done using evidence from intra-GP analysis. However, the results of the comparison between the two GPs can also shed light on the relationship between the sanctioning dimension of accountability and

⁹⁹Naturally ruling party members never concede to all the demands of opposition areas. As a result of pressurization by the opposition, they might concede a portion of those demands. Opposition members, even if dissatisfied with the approach of the GP, accept that ‘something is better than nothing’ and do not register their formal protest in GP meetings.

¹⁰⁰In Debipur GP two out of 17 (11.76%) of constituencies are controlled by the opposition whereas nine out of 90 (10%) NREGA works were done in opposition constituencies in 2008-09. Three works were done in opposition constituencies of Nowdapanur GP out of a total of 16 NREGA works done in 2008-09 (18.75%) while five out of 12 of its constituencies (41.6%) were controlled by the opposition; this is an indication of the much lower than proportion representation of opposition areas in Nowdapanur GP among the areas in which work was done.

GP performance. The results of the empirical study show that the GP which did worse on the sanctioning dimension of accountability (Debipur GP) has better overall performance than the GP which did better on the sanctioning dimension of accountability (Nowdapanur GP). Evidently, the pressure created on the GP by more competitive elections is unable to induce higher GP performance. The sanctioning dimension of accountability is therefore not having a significant impact on GP performance.

Deliberation Dimension and Performance

On the basis of the literature, it was hypothesized that the higher effectiveness of the deliberative mechanisms of accountability should lead to better performance (in terms of a higher extent of fulfilment of popular demands) because of a superior inflow of popular inputs. The deliberative forum of *Gram Sansad* enables the residents of West Bengal GPs to express their demands for various infrastructural assets or benefits of welfare programmes. A perusal of the powers given to the *Gram Sansads* in West Bengal's *Panchayat* law (especially the provision which states that the proposals made by the people in the *Gram Sansad* meetings are binding on the GP) seems to indicate that all such proposals have to be taken up for implementation. Chapter 6, however, has shown us how a very small percentage of *Gram Sansad* demands for infrastructural assets (embodied in the targets specified in the Annual Action Plans of the GPs for programmes such as NREGA, Untied Fund and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund) are actually fulfilled by the GP within a year. An important reason why only a small percentage of popular demands expressed in *Gram Sansad* meetings is fulfilled is because these demands have to pass through, and are filtered by, various decision making structures and stages of decision making (where prioritization and selection of

applied) before these are ultimately fulfilled. The account below gives us an idea about the complex processes that operate inside the ‘black box’ of GP decision making, and the factors that shape, constrain or promote the fulfilment of popular demands.

After the *Gram Sansads* pass their respective lists of proposals, these proposals are approved in the *Gram Sabha* (see Chapter 4), arranged into Annual Action Plans of various programmes by the GP, approved in the general body meeting of the GP and then passed on to the higher levels for approval. The approval of the Action Plans of the GPs is followed by the selecting of specific works in the Action Plan for implementation. It should be noted that works are not taken up for implementation according to the serial order of works in the Action Plans (which is supposed to be based on the priority order identified by the *Gram Sansads*, as per the law). GPs and their committees, in reality, exercise discretion in selecting works for implementation. The final stage in the journey from expression of popular demands to fruition in outputs or created assets is the actual implementation of the selected works by the GP.

Preferences of decision makers play a role in selectivity and prioritization of works in different stages of decision making, especially at the stage of selecting works for implementation out of all the demands that have been expressed in the *Gram Sansad*. The considerations in selecting works are not just neutral but also often political. Such preferences therefore have a constraining impact on the realization of the popular demands expressed in *Gram Sansad* meetings. Apart from knowing the procedures used to decide the selection of works for implementation, it is thus important to know the considerations governing such selection.

The interview responses and GP meeting minutes indicate that urgency of need, and practical considerations such as seasonal factors and the amount of funds available are some of the criteria applied in selecting works at a particular point of time.

Technical calculations have to be made by the staff of the GP (especially the *Nirman Sahayak*) so as to arrive at the appropriate number and type of works to take up at a point of time. Yet another type of considerations, which is not readily visible but extremely significant, is political considerations. GPs are supposed to maintain equitable resource allocation between the various constituencies, including those controlled by the opposition parties. Both the selected GPs have constituencies controlled by the opposition – two out of seventeen in Debipur GP and five out of twelve in Nowdapanur GP. Interview responses from GP members belonging to the opposition political parties of the two GPs indicate a perception of a certain degree of ruling party discrimination against opposition constituencies in carrying out development works and allocating resources.

While GP decision makers are obligated to maintain an equitable allocation of resources between all the constituencies of the GP area, and work in co-operation with members of all political parties, it is worth asking whether they actually do so. Mobarokpur constituency in Debipur GP is controlled by the opposition AITC, and one of the two GP members representing this area commented on his perception of discrimination by the ruling party against his constituency:

The ruling party in the GP, CPI (M) exhibits partiality. It has an “allergy” towards Mobarokpur. Development has taken place in adjoining villages but not in Mobarokpur. A lot of development work has stopped midway (Author’s field interview with elected member of Debipur GP belonging to opposition party AITC, dated 8/10/2009).

This opposition GP member described how the ruling party of the GP was obstructing efforts to procure land for the *Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra* (alternative middle school) established in Mobarokpur. He commented, “The ruling party in the GP is making a political issue out of it, and delaying the sanctioning of land for the MSK (*Madhyamik*

Shiksha Kendra)” (Author’s field interview, dated 8/10/2009). The GUS Secretary of Mobarokpur also commented that there is evident neglect of Mobarokpur:

Mobarokpur is after all an opposition area. There is an evident neglect of Mobarokpur’s needs; it was promised by the GP that the *morum* road would be constructed before other constituencies in Mobarokpur, but this promise was not fulfilled (Author’s field interview with GUS Secretary of Mobarokpur Constituency of Debipur GP, dated 30/12/2009).

Debipur GP is one that is overwhelmingly dominated by one party, and therefore it is not surprising that its opposition members feel marginalized. Nowdapanur GP however has a much more competitive scenario, which is reflected in the presence of as many as eight members out of all its fourteen members who do not belong to the single largest party, the INC. The two members belonging to the Muslim League (both belonging to Soluadanga constituency) have experienced being part of the ruling coalition of the GP (between May 2008 to November 2009), as well as being part of the opposition thereafter. However, even when it was part of the ruling coalition, its constituency faced neglect by the single largest party (i.e. INC) that effectively controlled the GP, according to one of the two Muslim League member GP members:

There is inadequate co-operation from the Congress (INC) controlled GP. Even when the *Pradhan* was from Muslim League and we were part of the ruling coalition, there was no proper co-operation from the GP (Author’s field interview with current opposition member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to Muslim League, dated 1/01/2010).

The GUS secretary of Soluadanga however said that financial allocations made by the government were eventually reaching the area, and therefore there was no real problem of co-operation from the GP in that sense (Author’s field interview, dated 5/1/2010). The allegations of neglect against the opposition areas made in Debipur GP

are more vehement and severe than those made in Nowdapanur GP; this is possibly an indication that the opposition members of the latter, which has a more competitive electoral scenario, feel less alienated, or perceive their constituencies as being less marginalized in comparison to the other constituencies of the GP.

It is important to look at the objective output data before coming to any judgment about the discrimination of the ruling party against opposition constituencies in both GPs. The NREGA output data for Debipur GP show that there was fairer representation of opposition areas among all the areas in which works were carried out (see footnote number 101). While there might be instances of discrimination by the ruling party against opposition constituencies (as alleged by the GP and GUS members belonging to the opposition party), the data shows that opposition constituencies in Debipur GP are not completely deprived of development works done by the GP. In Nowdapanur GP, which has the numerically larger opposition, the representation of opposition area works among all NREGA works done is however less than proportionate. This shows that a larger opposition does not necessarily lead to a higher proportion of development gains to opposition areas. Decision making procedures employed by GPs may explain their actual inclusiveness of decision making and treatment of opposition constituencies.

Multiple mechanisms are used by Debipur GP to aid the selection of works for implementation. When selecting works for a particular constituency, the GP asks the concerned GUS or the representing GP member's opinion about which works are needed most urgently. The GUS may also pass a resolution for a particular work to be taken up, and such resolution is binding on the *Pradhan* (Author's field interview with Executive Assistant of Debipur GP, dated 10/09/2009). The GP general body meeting minutes reveal that the GP may also ask the GP members representing the different

constituencies to make a shortlist of the works most urgently needed for implementation in their respective constituencies, and arrange them in priority order as a basis for the GP to decide which work to take up. The GP meeting minutes of Debipur GP reveal frequent and focused discussion on the taking up of infrastructural works for implementation. This GP has also been seen to constitute and deploy inspection committees for the purpose of assessing the urgency of needs and demands. The function of such committees is to visit the various constituencies and neighbourhoods, assess the relative urgency of needs, and recommend to the GP the priority in which the various constituencies should be selected to carry out a particular type of work (say tube-well repair). One such inspection committee--appointed to assess the priority for carrying out tubewell sinking and re-sinking works in different constituencies using Untied Fund money -- consisted of the head of the infrastructure *Upa-samiti* of the GP, one GP member belonging to the opposition party, and two GP members from the ruling party (GP meeting minutes of Debipur GP, dated 22/09/2008).

In Nowdapanur GP, however, neither is the GUS involved in the selection of works for implementation, nor are inspection committees used in the selection process. The GP members representing the concerned constituencies are asked about their opinion as to which works need to be taken up urgently (Author's telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to ruling party INC, dated 20/05/2011). The GP meeting minutes of Nowdapanur GP also reveal discussion among GP members about the taking up of works for implementation. An interesting detail revealed by the GP meeting minutes of Nowdapanur GP is the GP adopting resolutions on taking up of works outside the *Gram Sansad*- approved Annual Action Plan of the GP. These works presumably arise from the preferences of the *Pradhan* or other GP members, rather than those of the *Gram Sansad* attendees or GUSs. Items of

the GP meeting minutes of this GP reveal that certain works of afforestation and road construction, that were not part of the original action plan of the GP, were taken up for implementation in 2008-09. These works were labelled as works of the Additional Action Plan. In fact, the *Pradhan* of this GP revealed that “if a decision is taken outside what is adopted by the *Gram Sansad*, then a *Gram Sansad* resolution legitimizing that GP decision is later passed” (Author’s field interview, dated 18/12/2009).

Debipur GP shows greater inclusiveness than Nowdapanur GP not only in obtaining recommendations to aid the selection process, but also in the actual decision making. With respect to infrastructural works of Debipur GP, the decisions on works to be taken up are first taken by the Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* (Author’s field interview with Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* head of Debipur GP, dated 29/12/2009). Such decisions are then ratified in the *Artha o Parikalpana* (Finance and Planning) *Upa-samiti* of the GP, followed by ratification in the general body meeting of the GP.¹⁰¹ In Nowdapanur GP, the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti* decides on the works to be carried out, and such decision is ratified in the general body meeting of the GP (Author’s telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to ruling party INC, dated 20/05/2011). Decision making in Nowdapanur GP appears to be more centralized since the various *Upa-samitis*, apart from the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti*, are not active, and their meetings are irregular. While Nowdapanur GP is characterized by a high degree of electoral competition, the heads of all its *Upa-samitis*, who make up the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti*, all belong to the ruling party.¹⁰² This probably

¹⁰¹The five *Upa-samitis* of the GP are for finance and planning, education and public health, women and child development and social welfare, agriculture and animal husbandry development, and industry and infrastructure. Each is made up of GP members and headed by a GP member. The heads of the four other *Upa-samitis* are the members of the *Artha o Parikalpana* (Finance and Planning) *Upa-samiti*, and the *Pradhan* is its ex-officio head. The Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti* is concerned with the co-ordination of the overall spending and planning by the GP.

¹⁰² Since all the *Upa-samiti* heads in Nowdapanur GP are from the ruling coalition, the high degree of political competition in this GP does not paralyze the working of the GP. In contrast, another GP in Berhampore block, Manindranagar GP, is paralyzed by its political competition since its *Upa-samiti*

explains why domination of decision making by the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti*, and less inclusive decision making procedures, result in less equitable allocation of NREGA resources to opposition constituencies in Nowdapanur GP.

The above accounts of selectivity in decision making and the impact of decision makers' preferences on such selectivity give us an idea about factors that constrain the translation of popular demands into outputs and benefits. On the other hand, there are certain actors present in the decision making process whose function is to highlight and push popular demands inside the decision making process. Intermediary entities such as the opposition group inside the GP and the *Gram Unnayan Samiti* (GUS) play the role of supervision, transmitting of information about people's needs, and pressurization of the GP to meet such needs within the decision making and implementation structures. By performing these tasks on behalf of the people, the opposition group and GUS can act as a link between popular demand and actual GP decision making and implementation. However, in actual practice, these intermediary actors are not always effective in effectively supervising and pressurizing the GP.

It has already been seen (pages 250-52) that the opposition groups in both GPs have limited effectiveness in pressurizing and monitoring the GP's ruling group. There is no sustained or clear pressure from these members on the *Pradhan* or the ruling party members to record opposition views. There is also no evidence of any concrete effort by the opposition party members in Nowdapanur GP or Debipur GP to protest against corruption. The opposition GP members do keep a watch on the treatment accorded to their respective constituencies by the ruling party, and adopt an approach of persuasion and compromise to obtain (a part of) the funds or development works that they demand

heads belong to different political parties, which makes it very difficult for them to agree on resolutions. The example about Manindranagar GP was given by the Secretary of Nowdapanur GP, and the *Panchayat* Development Officer (PDO) of Berhampore block. This researcher is grateful to the Secretary of Nowdapanur GP for pointing out the comparison between Nowdapanur GP and Manindranagar GP.

for these areas, instead of whistle blowing or registering of protest. Even with respect to this limited function, the GP with the larger opposition might not necessarily be more successful. It has already been seen that the GP with the larger opposition group – Nowdapanur GP - has less fair allocation of NREGA works to opposition constituencies.

The intermediary body of GUS, which exists at the constituency level, can play the role of conveying people's demands to decision makers and pressurizing them to take up specific works for implementation. As seen in Chapter 4, in both Debipur and Nowdapanur GP, GUSs are involved in preparing the list of demands for their respective constituencies. Interview responses of GUS Secretaries in both GPs show that GUSs make use of means such as interaction with local residents, household visits and (only in Debipur GP) institutionalized neighbourhood meetings known as *Para Baithaks* to formulate these demand lists. These demand lists are then approved in *Gram Sansad* meetings, and along with proposals added by *Gram Sansad* meeting attendees, constitute the Action Plans of the GPs. Therefore the GUSs constitute an important source of information about people's needs for the GP. The former *Pradhan* of Nowdapanur GP (who is a current opposition member) told this researcher that GUS has a big role in providing information about people's needs (Author's field interview, dated 5/1/2010). An opposition member of Debipur GP and a ruling party representative of the same GP commented that GUS can help know people's preferences better because (owing to their localized existence) they have information about the needs of people living in different neighbourhoods, including those living in remote neighbourhoods (Author's field interviews with opposition elected member of Debipur GP, dated 8/10/2009, and with elected member of Debipur GP belonging to ruling CPI (M), dated 1/9/2009).

In both GPs, therefore, GUSs help in channelizing people's preferences into the GP's decision making process at the stage of expression of people's preferences and Action Plan preparation, though, as recognized in Chapter 4, intermediated expression has certain shortcomings and is not superior to expression by the people themselves. GUSs are, afterall, highly politicized in their nature and functioning, and political preferences shape their preparation of demand lists. Yet it must be recognized that GUSs perform the role of demand aggregation and are a source of information about people's needs for the GP decision makers.

While GUSs play a role at the stage of demand expression and aggregation, it is pertinent to ask whether they also play a role at the stage of selection of specific works for implementation. As already seen, the decision makers of Nowdapanur GP do not consult the GUS at this stage; the decision making process followed in Debipur GP, however, involves consultation with GUS. The *Pradhan* of Debipur GP revealed, "The GUS informs which demand is the most important priority at the moment" (Author's field interview, dated 14/09/2009). An elected member of the same GP belonging to the ruling CPI (M) added that GUSs convey information about people's needs to the GP in the gap between two *Gram Sansad* meetings; for instance the GUS informs the GP when a tube-well in its constituency is in need of urgent repair (Author's field interview, dated 3/09/2009).

While GUSs are not involved in Nowdapanur GP's decisions of taking up specific works for implementation, it must be noted that GUSs themselves have been empowered to take up and implement small-scale works in their respective constituencies. GUSs in Nowdapanur GP have been involved in works broadly related to hygiene, health and nutrition whereas GUSs in Debipur GP have been involved in works such as repair of toilets and *Anganwadi Kendra* buildings. The benefits of giving

money to GUSs are that works can be done by the GUS more quickly compared to work done by the GP (Author's field interview with Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* head of Nowdapanur GP, dated 14/12/2009). GUSs are also more localized and connected to needs on the ground, and can accordingly take prompt efforts to meet urgent needs such as for arranging for medical care for ill villagers (Author's field interview with GUS Secretary of Srirampur-Panchberia constituency of Nowdapanur GP, dated 7/01/2010).

The unique feature of the GUS is the representation of the opposition party members through inclusion of the second highest winner of votes in that constituency in the last GP election. The GUS secretary of Mobarokpur constituency in Debipur GP (belonging to the AITC, which is the opposition party of the GP but the ruling party in Mobarokpur constituency) testified to the positive impact of opposition representation on the working of the GUS:

The presence of opposition members in GUS is a good idea. They exert pressure to get work done, and therefore their presence makes a positive difference. Earlier when the CPI (M) was the ruling party in Mobarokpur constituency, the GP members representing this constituency were not very competent. However, because of GUS and the presence of opposition members (belonging to AITC) in GUS, some work was done. I was a GUS member even then (Author's field interview with GUS Secretary of Mobaorkpur constituency of Debipur GP, dated 30/12/2009).

The GUS's effectiveness is undermined when opposition members in GUS refuse to come for meetings, or the formation or functioning of GUS is paralyzed because of disharmonious political competition. In some constituencies of Nowdapanur GP, the opposition is boycotting the meetings of GUS. Conversations with elected representatives of three out of the ten constituencies in which GUS was constituted in

Nowdapanur GP revealed that for the two of these three areas, opposition members did not come for GUS meetings and did not co-operate. For the other constituency, also controlled by the ruling INC, the opposition party member attended occasionally (Author's telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP representing Sripurdanga constituency, dated 21/09/2010). The refusal or unwillingness of opposition members to attend GUS meetings obliterates the possible advantages of opposition representation in the GUS viz. greater vigilance and applying positive pressure for development.

The GUS could be constituted in all the 17 constituencies of Debipur GP, including the opposition constituencies, which are marked by a higher degree of political competition. In two constituencies of Nowdapanur GP, on the other hand, GUSs could not be constituted due to political conflict. The attempt to constitute GUSs in these two constituencies of Nowdapanur GP was marked by violence and chaos. The reason behind the outbreak of conflict between parties, that prevented the GUS from being constituted, was the irreconcilable and opportunistic disagreement between the ruling and opposition parties of these constituencies about which party the GUS Secretary would be from; each party was adamant in pushing its own candidate for the post.

The GUS has several important functions: supervision, pressurization, conveying information about people's needs, and also delegated spending on health related works. The non-constitution of GUS due to disharmonious political competition would thus be detrimental to GP service delivery in the concerned constituencies. The Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* head of Nowdapanur GP highlighted that the absence of GUS is a serious obstacle to development work, especially in view of its health-related spending functions (Author's field interview, dated 18/12/2009).

Thus, the short-sighted nature of political competition in Nowdapanur GP is hindering GUS functioning in Nowdapanur GP. Electoral competition (which results in opposition representation in GUS) could have had a wholesome effect or adverse effect on the working of GUS, depending on whether the nature of political competition is lively but harmonious (for example seen in Mobarokpur constituency of Debipur GP) or whether it is short sighted, opportunistic and taking the form of irresolvable political conflict as seen in some constituencies of Nowdapanur GP.¹⁰³

GUS also have an important role to play with respect to supervision of the implementation work going on in their respective constituencies, in order to keep track of the progress of work, and also to check irregularities and corruption. Non-NREGA works that have an expenditure of above INR 20,000 can be implemented through contractors, and it is imperative (for the sake of fairness and transparency) to supervise and monitor the implementation work done through contractors, starting from the tender process to the awarding of the contract to the quality of the actual construction work taken up by the contractor. The GUS, by virtue of its 'localness' is well suited to monitor the tender process as well as the work being done by contractors in its constituency. The head of the Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* of Debipur GP revealed the valuable contribution of the GUS towards monitoring of ongoing works:

GUS carries out inspection of ongoing infrastructural works; as a result works are carried out smoothly. GUS members know their village well and hence can carry out supervision more effectively (Author's field interview with head of Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* of Debipur GP, dated 29/12/2009).

¹⁰³ Certain studies have commented that electoral competition has a positive impact on performance as long as it is supplemented by political competition that is harmonious and devoid of gross opportunism (Crook and Manor 1998; Faguet 2006). We thus see that some specific findings of the comparative study between the chosen West Bengal cases are consistent with this hypothesis.

All the GUS secretaries interviewed in the two GPs confirmed that their respective GUSs were involved in monitoring of implementation work being done in their respective constituencies, both for NREGA and non-NREGA works. The GUS Secretary of Debipur-Chhalalpur constituency of Debipur GP elaborated that with respect to NREGA, the GUS sees to it that materials are being supplied, works being done properly and NREGA wages are being paid to labourers (Author's field interview, dated 1/09/2009). The GUS Secretary of Sripurdanga constituency in Nowdapanur GP clarified that the GUS has full responsibility to see that contractors are doing their work properly, and in the event that contractors fail in their job, then the GUS informs the GP, and money flow is stopped (Author's field interview, dated 19/12/2009).

The Executive Assistant of Debipur GP summed up the importance of GUSs in carrying out the task of monitoring: GUSs by taking up the monitoring of implementation were greatly helping the *Pradhan* and the GP, since it is not possible for the *Pradhan* to inspect the work on the ground at all times. The GUSs in Debipur GP, according to the Executive Assistant, were taking their task of supervision very seriously (Author's field interview, dated 29/12/2009). The non-constitution of GUS in two constituencies of Nowdapanur GP therefore is hindering the task of supervision to some extent, compared to Debipur GP where GUSs have been constituted in all constituencies and are involved in supervision of ongoing work.

Having seen the complex processes that transpire between the expression of people's demands in *Gram Sansad* meetings and actual GP outputs, the impact of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad* on GP performance may be summed up as follows: *Gram Sansad* demands in both the chosen GPs are filtered through the layers of decision making mentioned above. However a relatively larger proportion of *Gram Sansad* demands for infrastructural assets (which also constitute GP targets) was

fulfilled in Debipur GP. While a larger proportion of *Gram Sansad* demands was fulfilled in Debipur GP, the functioning of *Gram Sansad* as a deliberative mechanism in this GP was ridden by major shortcomings of lower attendance in *Gram Sansad* meetings, and non-attendance of people not belonging to the ruling party (see Chapter 4). Nowdapanur GP was found to be superior to Debipur GP in terms of the deliberation dimension of accountability due to the higher effectiveness of its deliberative mechanism (see Chapter 4); however Debipur GP is ahead on both measures of fulfilment of popular demand--extent of satisfaction of *Gram Sansad* demands and the satisfaction of villagers with infrastructural outputs (see Chapter 6). Debipur GP was also found to have overall superior GP performance. This implies the lack of any association between the deliberation dimension of accountability and fulfilment of popular demands, and also between this dimension of accountability and overall performance.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the higher effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism does not result in a higher fulfilment of popular demand. What then explains the variation between the two GPs with respect to the extent of fulfilment of popular demand? Evidently, other performance determinants such as finances and capacity are critical to translate a larger percentage of popular demands into outputs, and explain why Debipur GP was able to fulfil a larger portion of popular demands. Elements of the decision making processes described above also play a role in the translation of popular demands expressed in the deliberative forum, into outputs that satisfy people's preferences. In the case of Debipur GP, the higher inclusiveness of decision making, and also the more effective role of intermediary bodies such as GUS, may not explain why a higher proportion of *Gram Sansad* demands were fulfilled. However they may possibly explain greater inclusiveness in this GP's resource

allocation and service delivery among different constituencies of the GP, and less arbitrariness in allocating resources among competing demands (because of more painstaking efforts by the GP to assess the urgency of needs) . Such inclusiveness is a likely factor contributing to its overall higher popular satisfaction levels with respect to infrastructural assets provided by the GP.

Monitoring Dimension and Performance

Social Audit, carried out under NREGA, is the sole monitoring mechanism available in West Bengal GPs. Logically speaking, one may hypothesize that monitoring mechanisms such as Social Audit, by exposing wastage or loss of funds, may lead to correction of such loss or wastage, and consequent improvement in the GP's fund utilization and performance. Social Audit, if done in a thorough and comprehensive way, may also expose other shortcomings in implementation such as defects in the quality of infrastructural works and delay in completing works, and induce corrective learning. Such corrective learning, in turn, may improve GP performance.

It was seen in Chapter 4 that Debipur GP was better than Nowdapanur GP on the monitoring dimension of accountability by virtue of its relatively higher effectiveness of Social Audit. Since Social Audit pertains to a scrutiny of NREGA implementation, it is necessary to see which GP did better on NREGA output performance in order to decipher the causal impact of Social Audit on performance. Debipur GP did better on NREGA output performance, and also on overall GP performance. The Social Audit figures presented in Chapter 4 pertain to 2009-10. As seen in Chapter 6, Debipur GP had better NREGA output performance for 2009-10 and 2010-11, in terms of a higher proportion of completed works.

One should note that Social Audit is a nascent accountability mechanism, introduced only in 2009-10. Logically speaking, a part of the impact of Social Audit on NREGA output performance could have been felt in the same financial year. This is because Social Audit in 2009-10 took place in the middle of the financial year (July or August of the calendar year 2009), which meant that it could have possibly influenced the ongoing and remaining NREGA works for that financial year (which ended in March of the calendar year 2010). The nature of Social Audit is also relevant in this respect; Social Audit also involves monitoring of on-going works, and not just an ex-post facto review of works completed in the past. It is conceivable that Social Audit in any particular financial year can have part of its impact felt in the same financial year. Nevertheless, the full impact of this nascent mechanism might not have been felt in the year of its introduction. The full impact of corrective learning (i.e. learning from the exposure of mistakes, and consequent performance improvement) can possibly only be felt on a more long time basis. NREGA output figures for 2010-11 however, show the same conclusions as 2009-10 figures, regarding the association between effectiveness of Social Audit (held in 2009-10) and NREGA output performance (for 2010-11). The reader must note that a more long-term observation of the impact of Social Audit on NREGA output (by collecting data for several years) is likely to yield more robust findings about the relationship between Social Audit and NREGA output performance.

Debipur GP, which has better effectiveness of Social Audit, also shows better NREGA output performance. The West Bengal study therefore shows an association between the effectiveness of Social Audit and NREGA output performance, and also between the monitoring dimension of accountability and overall performance. However, such association does not necessarily indicate causality, and needs to be

substantiated with evidence of the operation of causal processes between Social Audit and NREGA output performance.

GP elected members and staff in Debipur GP testified to the positive impact of Social Audit (in terms of correcting faults in certain aspects of NREGA implementation), while those in Nowdapanur GP felt that it was being done in a very superficial way and having no positive impact, as seen in Chapter 4. While Social Audit may be having some impact in Debipur GP (as claimed by the staff members and *Pradhan*), it is not affecting NREGA output performance. Interviews with a staff member of Debipur GP revealed that the defects exposed through Social Audit pertained to beneficiary-related matters under NREGA implementation, and had nothing to do with NREGA physical output (asset creation) performance. The *Nirman Sahayak* of Debipur GP revealed that Social Audit in the GP had revealed that some villagers were not aware that they had to apply at the GP office in order to obtain NREGA employment. They were therefore not taking the initiative to apply, and were losing out on NREGA employment as a result (Author's telephonic interview, dated 10/01/2012).¹⁰⁴ NREGA has both employment generation and infrastructure-creation functions, but Social Audit in Debipur GP is having an impact on the former and not the latter.

The absence of independence in the Social Audit process is possibly undermining its effectiveness in exposing faults and inducing corrective learning. The staff members of Debipur GP, such as the Secretary and the *Nirman Sahayak*, admitted that they were actively involved in carrying out Social Audit and completing the Social Audit report. The *Nirman Sahayak* of Debipur GP revealed that the interest and involvement of the Social Audit Team members is very limited because they are not

¹⁰⁴ At the time of this telephonic interview, the *Nirman Sahayak* had very recently been transferred to another GP. Matters related to Social Audit in Debipur GP, were, however, fresh in his memory.

remunerated for their job (Author's telephonic interview, dated 10/01/2012). The GP staff members are already over-burdened; therefore it is highly unlikely that the scrutiny of NREGA implementation involved in the Social Audit exercise is done in such a careful way that it is becoming a significant source of corrective learning with respect to improvement of fund utilization and output performance for the GP.

The degree of popular input used in preparing the Social Audit report is very meagre, and is from the interview responses of five NREGA beneficiaries elicited by the Social Audit team and conversation of the team members with a few workers at the NREGA worksites. Furthermore, such input is only related to the rights of NREGA beneficiaries as workers (such as the timely payment of wages, facilities for workers at work sites, and time taken between application and actual employment). These inputs are important, but do not have a significant bearing on NREGA output performance. There is no popular input on the assessment of NREGA outputs (for instance on the quality of assets created through NREGA implementation), on expenditure-related matters, or on the time taken to complete the construction of the assets.

The popular monitoring mechanism of Social Audit therefore cannot be held responsible for the superior NREGA output performance of Debipur GP. Audits and other forms of monitoring carried out by higher levels of government are much more comprehensive, frequent and substantial compared to Social Audit, and may possibly be having a more notable impact on both GPs' fund utilization and performance than Social Audit. As far as monitoring of GP functioning is concerned, intermediate organizations such as GUS, and to an even greater extent, oversight conducted by higher levels of government, appear to be playing a more significant oversight role than a popular monitoring mechanism such as Social Audit.

Aspects of Performance and their Relationship with Accountability

As seen in Chapter 6, GP performance has been assessed in two functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. The impact of accountability on each of these functional areas is stated below.

Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure

It has been seen in Chapter 6 that Debipur GP had an overall superior performance in the area of infrastructure development. It is noteworthy that this GP performs better not only on physical output-based measures (such as achievement of larger proportion of targeted works, and higher rate of completion of works taken up) but also on satisfaction-based measures related to available infrastructure.

There is no association observed between overall accountability and overall performance in the area of infrastructure, since one GP does better on the former (Nowdapanur GP) and a different one on the latter (Debipur GP). There is also no association seen between overall accountability and satisfaction with infrastructural assets, because Debipur GP has lower overall accountability but higher satisfaction with infrastructural assets.

Two accountability mechanisms are specifically related to the functional area of infrastructure—the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad* and the monitoring mechanism of Social Audit. The popular demands for infrastructural assets expressed by the *Gram Sansad* constitute the infrastructural targets of the GP. Debipur GP was able to fulfil a higher proportion of these targets or demands. However as already stated, such achievement is not due to the higher effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism, but due to the impact of other performance determinants. It has also been seen that the popular monitoring mechanism pertaining specifically to an infrastructural programme

--Social Audit of NREGA implementation--is not having a significant impact on NREGA output performance.

Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education

Debipur GP has performed better than Nowdapanur GP in the functional area of alternative primary education, while Nowdapanur GP has higher overall accountability. Overall accountability of the GP therefore has no association with GP performance in the area of alternative primary education. Debipur GP, which performed better in this functional area, did better on only one dimension of accountability (the monitoring dimension). As already seen, the monitoring dimension is assessed in terms of the effectiveness of Social Audit, and the mechanism of Social Audit is only relevant for NREGA output performance under the functional area of infrastructure, and has no relevance for the functional area of alternative primary education.

It is relevant to state here certain insights about accountability in the field of alternative primary education, compared to accountability in the field of infrastructure. These insights indicate that the degree of accountability (in terms of popular pressure) varies from one functional area to another, i.e. people are relatively more active in pressurizing their elected representatives for certain functional areas (such as infrastructure) compared to others (such as education). It should be noted that the interview-based insights and examples given below pertain to pressure imposed on various decision makers such as *Panchayat Samiti*, *Zilla Parishad* and state government, and not necessarily to pressure imposed on GP decision makers. Nevertheless, they shed light on the general nature of popular pressure, and the relative importance that people attach to different functional areas.

The education *Karmadhyakshas* (standing committee heads) of Memari-I *Panchayat Samiti* and Burdwan *Zilla Parishad* (the district and block *Panchayats* above Debipur GP) were of the opinion that there is popular pressure on elected representatives to construct and repair roads and provide electricity, but not to provide facilities to educational institutions such as alternative primary schools (SSKs). They elaborated that people have been seen to boycott elections over issues such as the condition of roads and electricity, but never over the condition of educational institutions (Author's field interview with Education *Karmadhyaksha* of Memari-I *Panchayat Samiti*, dated 12/10/2009 and of Education *Karmadhyaksha* of Burdwan *Zilla Parishad*, dated 7/10/2009). Such lack of popular pressure for the field of education possibly leads to the consequence of decision makers giving lower priority to the needs of educational institutions such as SSKs,¹⁰⁵ and more importance to works such as road repair and construction (given the context of fund constraints). As a result, educational institutions such as SSKs are plagued by the problem of poor facilities.

Certain observations collected from this study reveal that people have been seen, occasionally, to organize themselves and collectively pressurize decision makers for the improvement of infrastructure. All the voters of Sripurdanga village of Nowdapanur GP (over 500 in number) boycotted voting in the May 2011 Assembly elections¹⁰⁶ in West Bengal as a mark of protest against the very poor condition of the 'Badshahi Sadak', the road that connects this village to the adjoining villages. Mass petitions have been submitted, in the past (not to the concerned GP, but to the concerned *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad*) for the improvement of a very poor quality road in Mobarokpur village of Debipur GP, which has not undergone any maintenance work

¹⁰⁵While GPs have primary responsibility for providing facilities to SSKs within their area, the *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* can also take up additional works to provide facilities to SSKs lying within their respective blocks/districts according to their discretion.

¹⁰⁶Assembly elections are held for the constitution of the legislative assembly (the lower house of the legislature) of the state of West Bengal.

since its construction (Author's field interview with GUS Secretary of Mobarokpur constituency of Debipur GP, dated 30/12/2009). A senior bureaucrat in Burdwan *Zilla Parishad* revealed that even though road construction activities in his district (Burdwan district) were at a very high level, there was still popular pressure for road improvement, for instance to upgrade *morum* roads into pitch roads. He also opined that education, health and nutrition were areas of low priority in popular demand as compared to infrastructure (Author's field interview with Additional District Magistrate, Burdwan *Zilla Parishad*, dated 7/10/2009).

Overall Impact of Accountability on Performance

Nowdapanur GP is rated higher than Debipur GP on overall accountability, because it does better on two out of three dimensions of accountability, including the crucial sanctioning dimension. However, in terms of overall performance, Debipur GP performs better. Therefore there is no association between overall accountability and overall performance seen in the results of the comparison between the two GPs in West Bengal.

Evidence of the non-operation of the required causal processes between each accountability dimension and performance also shows the lack of any significant causal impact of accountability in improving performance. The evidence from these two sources--case comparison and causal process tracing--therefore shows that accountability is not a significant determinant of GP performance in actual practice in the West Bengal GPs. Table 23 summarizes the relationship between accountability dimensions and performance for the two GPs.

Table 23: Impact of Accountability Dimensions on Performance in the West Bengal GPs

Accountability dimension	Association with overall performance?	Operation of causal processes?	Significant impact on performance?
Sanctioning	No - Nowdapanur GP better on sanctioning dimension but Debipur GP has higher performance.	No	No
Deliberation	No - Nowdapanur GP better on deliberation dimension but Debipur GP has higher performance.	No ¹⁰⁷	No
Monitoring	Yes - Debipur GP better on monitoring dimension and also has higher performance.	No	No
Aggregate Accountability	No – Nowdapanur GP has higher aggregate accountability but lower performance.	No	No

Source: The author's analysis and inference

Table 23 shows that none of the dimensions of accountability has a notable causal impact on performance. Furthermore, it has already been seen that GP performance in the selected functional areas of infrastructure or alternative primary education cannot be explained by the impact of accountability. The higher overall performance of Debipur GP is explained not by higher accountability, but by variation in other performance determinants. The impact of other performance determinants is explored in the next section.

Other Determinants of Performance

It was seen in the framework of variables of this study (see Chapter 1) that there are three possible primary performance determinants that can explain performance

¹⁰⁷ A clarification needs to be stated here. While there is a link (albeit constrained) between the popular demands expressed in the deliberative forum and decision making in both West Bengal GPs, there is no causal link seen between higher and more inclusive attendance in the deliberative forum (which is mainly responsible for Nowdapanur GP's relative superiority on the deliberation dimension) and GP performance.

variation: accountability, financial strength and capacity. Since the role of accountability in explaining variation in performance has already been examined and ruled out, this section shall examine the role of the other two primary determinants (finances and capacity) in explaining variation in performance between Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP. The framework also contains a secondary independent variable, preferences of decision makers. The impact of this secondary determinant of performance will be examined in the latter part of this section.

Primary Determinants: Finances and Capacity

The possible primary determinants of performance (other than accountability) are finances and capacity. Their impact on performance is assessed in this section.

Finances

This factor is widely assumed to be a critical determinant of GP performance. It can be seen from Table 24 that the GP with the overall superior performance, Debipur GP, had much higher total revenue and expenditure than Nowdapanur GP in 2008-09.

Table 24: Overall Financial Strength of the West Bengal GPs (2008-09) in Indian Rupees (INR)

	Total revenue	Revenue per head of population	Total expenditure	Expenditure per head of by population
Debipur GP	15,309,835	579.08	16,043,433	606.83
Nowdapanur GP	5,593,736	263.31	5,174,677	243.58

Source: Data from Annual Income-Expenditure statements of the two GPs

The financial superiority of Debipur GP is more clearly demonstrated when the population factor is controlled for in comparing financial strength.¹⁰⁸ Debipur GP's spending per head of its population, and its revenue per head of population, are more than twice those of Nowdapanur GP.

The components of the revenue of GPs are two-fold: Own Source Revenue and financial allocation from higher levels of government (the latter mainly comprising funds of central and state programmes such as NREGA, Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, and Untied Fund of State Finance Commission). Table 25 shows that the financial allocations made by the higher levels of government under various programmes (barring BRGF)¹⁰⁹ are much higher for Debipur GP than for Nowdapanur GP.¹¹⁰

Table 25: Financial Allocations Made under Different Programmes (2008-09) to the West Bengal GPs (in INR)

Programme	Debipur GP	Nowdapanur GP
NREGA	3,460,100	1,011,438
Twelfth Finance Commission	881,939	462,485
Untied Fund	615,374	335,376
BRGF	0	216,077

Source: Annual Income–Expenditure statements of the two GPs

What explains the differences in financial allocation between the two GPs? Some light can be thrown on this issue by examining the principles of fund allocation for some of these programmes. NREGA's financial allocation is driven by the demand for work among villagers and every subsequent allocation in a financial year is

¹⁰⁸See the Appendix for population figures.

¹⁰⁹BRGF or Backward Regions Grant Fund allocations are given only to districts designated as backward areas. Murshidabad district to which Nowdapanur GP belongs receives BRGF funding while Burdwan district (to which Debipur GP belongs) does not.

¹¹⁰The allocations stated in Table 25 do not add up to the total revenue of the two GPs stated in Table 24. This is because the programmes stated in Table 25 only pertain to infrastructural development. GPs also receive other fund allocations, such as for programmes in other functional areas like social security.

determined on the basis of the GP's success in spending earlier funds. The higher NREGA allocation of Debipur GP indicates the higher aggregate demand for NREGA employment in this GP (though the higher demand is to an extent a function of higher population) and also its ability to spend the allocations.

The allocations of Twelfth Finance Commission and Untied (Second State Finance Commission) funds are done according to fixed formulae that are highly elaborate. Since the formulae are so specific, the likelihood of political motives influencing the allocation of these funds is not high. What is noteworthy is that distribution of the fund of each district among *Panchayat Samitis* is done largely on the basis of population (50% weightage) and the remaining weightage is divided on the basis of equal weightage on the criteria of SC and ST population, and three criteria of socio-economic backwardness.¹¹¹ The *Panchayat Samiti* fund, in turn, is divided among all the GPs in the block based on two criteria of 50% weightage each—population and proportion of illiterate population. The criterion of higher population, followed by higher SC and ST population, are most significant in explaining the higher allocation of funds to Burdwan district, Memari-I block and Debipur GP because Murshidabad district, Berhampore block and Nowdapanur GP appear to be more deserving of higher allocation considering the other criteria which are all indicators of socio-economic backwardness.

Debipur GP is the economically more developed GP, and it also has higher aggregate financial strength. The assumed relationship between economic development and higher financial strength is logically most obvious in the relationship between

¹¹¹Distribution of the Twelfth Finance Commission district fund and Untied Fund's district fund among *Panchayat Samitis* is done on the basis of population (50% weightage) and SC and ST population, illiterate population, number of villages without power and number of villages without *pucca* (all-weather) approach road (12.5% weightage each). The distribution of the state fund among districts is done on the basis of population (50% weightage) and density of population, rural population, ST population, SC population, illiterate population, infant mortality, and per capita district domestic product (7-8% weightage to each) (Government of West Bengal 2005a, 2005b).

economic development and the extent of Own Source Revenue (OSR), the revenue raised by the GP through sources such as taxes, fees and rents,¹¹² and not between economic development and the extent of funds transferred from higher levels of government. Population strength and composition, and not economic development, largely explain why Debipur GP got higher allocations under central and state programmes. Table 26 shows the extent of OSR raised by both West Bengal GPs.

Table 26: Own Source Revenue (OSR) of the West Bengal GPs (2008-09)

	Total OSR (amount in INR)	OSR as proportion of total revenue	OSR per head of population
Debipur GP	454,146	2.97%	17.18
Nowdapanur GP	68,715	1.23%	3.23

Source: Data from the Annual Income –Expenditure statements of the two GPs

Table 26 shows that for both the GPs, OSR forms a very small percentage of overall revenue. OSR is therefore not a very significant determinant behind GP performance. Even the economically developed GP, Debipur GP, mobilized only about 3% of its total revenue on its own efforts; its OSR share and amount are however higher than those of Nowdapanur GP. Nowdapanur GP is characterized by its dismal achievement in OSR mobilization: it was able to obtain, on average, a paltry amount of three Indian Rupees as OSR from each resident in the entire year. Therefore, Debipur GP has comparatively higher OSR (keeping with its status as an economically more developed GP). However, its overall financial superiority is explained to a very small extent by its superior OSR, and largely by the higher allocations it receives from higher levels of government.

¹¹²The major source of OSR for GPs are house and land tax, followed by items such as house construction fee, business registration fee, and rents on houses and property owned by the GP.

Financial superiority, in the form of higher aggregate revenue, has an undeniable relationship with GP performance. Finances are after all an indispensable ingredient of service delivery by GPs. Debipur GP, which shows better overall GP performance, has marked financial superiority over Nowdapanur GP. Elected representative responses affirm the importance of finances as a determinant of performance. The financial constraint was stated most frequently by the elected representatives interviewed in the two GPs as the top obstacle that hinders their ability to satisfy popular demands and needs. The *Pradhan* of Debipur GP commented, “Funds are always a barrier. The problem is that there are too many demands and too few funds” (Author’s field interview, dated 14/09/2009). The *Pradhan* of Nowdapanur GP too commented that fund flow is low compared to the magnitude of needs (Author’s field interview, dated 18/12/2009). The head of the Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* of Debipur GP added that his GP being a large one with 17 constituencies and over 20 villages meant that there were a lot of demands, but the allotted funds are not sufficient to meet them (Author’s field interview, dated 29/12/2009). Such responses show that funds are a major determining factor behind GP performance. While elected representatives in both GPs perceive available funds to be insufficient, one can infer that the GP having larger financial strength would be at a relative advantage in meeting popular demands.

Apart from the the insufficient amount of funds relative to the magnitude of popular demand, the other constraints identified by the *Pradhans* and other elected representatives of the two GPs were related to lack of autonomy in spending and delays in arrival of funding. The existing programmatic funds such as Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, Untied Fund and BRGF are ridden by conditionalities. The *Pradhans* of Debipur GP and Nowdanapur GP commented that even though the Untied

Fund is named so, in actuality it is hardly untied (Author's field interviews with *Pradhans* of Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP, dated 14/09/2009 and 18/12/2009 respectively). ¹¹³ Even NREGA, the largest source of funds for GP and a key resource for infrastructural development, has a very important restricting factor: the stipulated 60: 40 ratio of labour costs to capital costs means that there are limitations on material intensive construction work being taken up under NREGA, as per the rules. The Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* head of Debipur GP commented that because of such restrictions, the bulk of the NREGA fund has to be spent on *pukur kata* (pond excavation), and GP decision makers are constrained to take up other kinds of infrastructural work (such as road construction and repair) that might be needed (Author's field interview, dated 29/12/2009) . Another constraint was revealed by the head of the Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP - unused funds of one programme cannot be spent on another programme without obtaining approval from the higher authorities (Author's telephonic interview, dated 12/07/2010).

The elected representatives of both GPs also identified delays in fund arrival from the higher levels as an important problem. The problem of delayed arrival of NREGA funds was experienced in Debipur GP; this had the consequences of NREGA *pukur kata* work having to be stopped, and when the money finally arrived, it was monsoon and these kinds of works could not be done (Author's field interviews with Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* head of Debipur GP, dated 29/12/2009 and a ruling party elected representative of Debipur GP, dated 3/09/2009). The Secretary of Nowdapanur GP mentioned that the delay in arrival of certain programme funds is endemic; for

¹¹³ The Twelfth Finance Commission funds may only be spent on maintenance or repair of existing assets, while Untied fund may only be spent on construction of new assets (Murshidabad Zilla Parishad 2009). At least 5% Twelfth Finance Commission funds have to be spent on maintenance of GP accounts, 15% has to be spent on creation and improvement of database (including computerization) and 10% has to be spent on water and sanitation services including solid waste management; even the untied fund has fixed percentages for spending on certain functional areas (Order of *Panchayats* and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal, dated 1st August 2005).

instance funds supposed to come in April, the beginning of the financial year, arrive only in November or December (Author's field interview, dated 18/12/2009).¹¹⁴

However, the availability of funds is not sufficient by itself to ensure better performance. What is equally, if not more, significant is the utilization of available funds. Table 27 shows the extent of fund utilization in both GPs in 2008-09. The total amount of available funds shown in Table 27 represents a combination of revenue obtained by the GP in 2008-09 and its unspent funds from earlier years.

Table 27: Aggregate Fund Utilization by the West Bengal GPs (2008-09)

	Total amount of available funds (in INR)	Total Expenditure in INR	Fund utilization proportion
Debipur GP	16,986,300	16,043,433	94.45%
Nowdapanur GP	8,012,858	5,174,677	64.58%

Source: Data from the Annual Income-Expenditure statements of the two GPs

It can be seen from Table 27 that Debipur GP is much ahead in utilizing available funds. This GP spent as much as 94.45% of its available finances in 2008-09. Nowdapanur GP lags far behind by being able to spend only 64.58% of its funds. Debipur GP's superiority in financial strength, and even more crucially its superior utilization of available financial resources, is a very significant factor in explaining its better performance compared to Nowdapanur GP. What explains Debipur GP's superiority in utilizing available funds? The differences in fund utilization between both GPs might be attributed to a complex mix of factors that include aspects of capacity such as skills of staff and elected members in strategic management and planning, GP leadership, elected member and staff efforts and contributions, as well as other factors

¹¹⁴ The Education *Karmadhyaksha* of Berhampore *Panchayat Samiti* confirmed that programme funds such as Untied fund and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund arrive from the higher levels only at the end of the financial year (Author's field interview, dated 9/12/2009).

such as fund arrival timings. The remaining primary performance determinant – capacity - can thus explain Debipur GP's superiority in utilizing available funds to an extent.

Capacity

The capacity of GPs has certain components—human resource capacity, leadership, material capacity and financial management. Human resource capacity consists of the abilities and efforts of GP elected members and staff. Material capacity comprises the equipment and facilities of the GP office or establishment. GP capacity also includes elements financial management and leadership, because these elements play a role in explaining effective utilization of funds by GPs. Leadership is both a component of human resource capacity, and a component of GP capacity in its own right.

The capacity of the elected members is an important component of the human resource capacity of a GP, and skills and knowledge, in turn, are a component of the capacity of elected members. Training programmes for *Pradhans* and *Upa-samiti* heads in West Bengal GPs has been going for some years, whereas training programmes for elected representatives other than *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads are a more recent initiative, started in late 2009. All GP members, at the time of being sworn into office, are given a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) book in the Bengali language which provides detailed information about GP structure, powers, fund sources, rules and other matters related to GP functioning.

One would expect that knowledge received from training would not be such a significant factor affecting decision making by elected representatives as it would affect bureaucrats. However there may be instances of training shaping the decisions of elected representatives. An NGO known as 'Sebabrata' in Berhampore block is

involved in training GP functionaries in issues related to health and sanitation. The Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* head of Nowdapanur GP underwent such training at the Seababrata headquarters, and revealed that after undergoing such training, he realized the importance of constructing platforms at the base of tube-wells to prevent contaminants present in the soil from seeping into the ground water. On such realization, he went on to order the construction of these platforms in various tube-wells of his GP on his own initiative, without any requests from the people emerging to this end (Author's field interview, dated 19/12/2009). This also shows an instance of responsiveness to 'need' rather than to 'expressed popular demand'.

The author witnessed a training session for elected members (other than *Pradhans* and *Upa-samiti* heads) at Berhampore block Headquarters. Elected members from various GPs in Berhampore block, including Nowdapanur GP attended. The two elected members who attended from Nowdapanur GP were opposition members; none of the members belonging to the ruling party attended. In a conversation before the commencement of training, the two trainers expressed pessimism about the impact of such training; they felt that most attendees would not be able to assimilate most of what would be taught. The assistant trainer felt that education level and pre-occupation of poorer elected representatives with earning their livelihood were factors that constrained the efficacy and impact of training (Author's field conversation with trainers of GP members, dated 10/12/2009). The low interest in training was evident in the fact that only ten elected representatives attended the session on its first day, representing as many as seventeen GPs of Berhampore block. This happened in spite of the fact that a lot of effort had been put in to attract elected representatives for the training session, such as sending letters to the elected representatives and their respective GP *Pradhans*, and phone calls to the GP representatives who owned

telephones (Author's field conversation with trainers of GP members, dated 10/12/2009). The author observed that the trainers put in a lot of effort to clarify issues related to the structure and functions of the GP using a colourful power point presentation and other audio-visual means. The attendance level among the attendees was mixed; they talked among themselves occasionally, but otherwise appeared to be attentive. In an informal conversation during the lunch break, some of them expressed that they were enjoying the session and were feeling better informed.

The existing nature of training for elected representatives (including *Upa-samiti* heads) is rather bookish in nature. More practically oriented training is the need of the hour. The Agriculture *Upa-samiti* head of Debipur GP, commented, "The training sessions merely revise what is said in the FAQ books; nothing new is said. But what is really needed from training is knowledge of practical matters and the real picture to be conveyed" (Author's field interview, dated 1/09/2009). Therefore, training needs to go far beyond the description of the law, rules and structural composition of the GP that are actually taught in training sessions.

Skills and knowledge, including that obtained from training, are important but cannot be of any use unless members show interest and involvement in GP functioning. Skills and knowledge therefore comprise passive capacity, whereas the actual efforts and contribution of GP members comprise active capacity. Whether or not the GP members come to the GP office regularly, take their duties seriously and sincerely involve themselves in the GP's work has a fundamental bearing on the GP's human resource capacity. The overall low degree of involvement of GP members is a problem in both GPs, and seen more seriously in the case of Nowdapanur GP.

Low interest and involvement by elected representatives is recognized by certain active elected representatives in both GPs, and is seen by them as an obstacle to

GP performance. They identify the absence of minimum incentives and absence of knowledge as factors responsible for the poor motivation and involvement of GP members. The head of the Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP commented:

GP members should be re-imbursed travelling expenses. If better Travelling Allowance and salary could be paid, then GP members could work better to fulfil needs of villagers. If one wants people to work hard, then one should pay them the value of their effort. GP members are often poor and this makes it difficult for them to bear expenses such as traveling to and from the office. GP members, especially *Upa-samiti* heads have myriad duties and complex, challenging jobs. However they are given a very measly honorarium (Author's field interview with head of Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP, dated 14/12/2009).

The *Pradhan* of Debipur GP felt that reimbursement of travelling expenditure and training would help GP members perform better:

Two things are important for GP members to perform better. Training (since different GP members have different education levels), and reimbursement of travelling expenditure. Training should be held annually or half yearly to ensure that GP members are abreast of knowledge on technical matters. This will improve the ability of GP members to do work. GP members have jobs of their own, for example some of them are labourers. They should at least be given travelling allowance to come to the GP office (Author's field interview with *Pradhan* of Debipur GP, dated 14/09/2009).

While the problems identified above, and the resulting low involvement of GP members is a problem for both GPs, Nowdapanur GP has even poorer involvement of elected members, compared to Debipur GP. One staff member of Nowdapanur GP complained to the author that GP members generally come to general body meetings

without adequate preparation and do not show enough initiative, which makes it very difficult to conduct the work of the GP (Author's field interview, dated 18/12/2009). The infrequent visits to the GP office by most GP members further show the low degree of involvement of GP members. This is a problem especially in Nowdapanur GP where only two GP members (the head of one *Upa-samiti* and the *Upa-Pradhan*) visit the office frequently, in addition to the *Pradhan*.¹¹⁵

There is a grave problem of non-seriousness among a majority of *Upa-samiti* heads in Nowdapanur GP. Unlike in Debipur GP, *Upa-samitis* other than the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti* are not active in Nowdapanur GP, due to the poorer interest of the GP members and *Upa-samiti* heads. Regular *Upa-samiti* meetings (barring those of the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti*) are not held in Nowdapanur GP, and these *Upa-samitis* show unwillingness to take initiative or responsibility (Author's telephonic interview with elected member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to ruling party INC, dated 28/07/2012). The failure of most GP members, especially of a majority of key office holders such as *Upa-samiti* heads, to perform their duties reduces the human resource capacity of Nowdapanur GP, and consequently has an adverse impact on its performance.

Leadership may explain, to an extent, why Debipur GP is in a relatively better position as far as the involvement of elected members in GP functioning and mobilization of the efforts of the elected representatives is concerned. GP leadership, especially the *Pradhan's* role, is important in mobilizing the human resources (staff and elected representatives) of the GP and getting the GP's work done. Leadership therefore plays an important role improving the human resource capacity of the GP. It is also an important component of GP capacity in its own right because of its role in giving

¹¹⁵The attendance of the GP members in the GP general body meetings, held about once a month, is however quite satisfactory for both GPs.

direction and momentum to the conduct of the GP's work. Three dimensions of leadership-- inclusiveness, decisiveness and authority, and stability/unity—are of special importance in fulfilling these leadership functions. The actual situation in the two GPs, with respect to these dimensions of leadership, is elaborated below.

There is evidence of the more inclusive nature of leadership and decision making in Debipur GP, compared to Nowdapanur GP. As already seen, Debipur GP employs more inclusive methods of decision making, such as involving *Upa-samitis*, GUSs and inspection committees in the decision making process. Such inclusiveness of leadership probably plays a role in eliciting the contribution and participation of a greater number of GP members, as well as of intermediary actors such as GUS. Decision making in Debipur GP does not appear to be highly concentrated in the *Pradhan* or the Finance and Planning *Upa-samiti*. In fact, the opposition members of Debipur GP, who are otherwise critical of the ruling party of the GP, actually praised the *Pradhan* of the GP for his personal good qualities (even though the *Pradhan* belongs to the ruling party). One opposition elected member of Debipur GP commented that the *Pradhan* listens to what opposition members have to say (Author's field interview, dated 17/09/2009). Another opposition member remarked that "The *Pradhan* is an intelligent man, but he is constrained by CPI (M) party control; therefore he cannot carry out his good intentions" (Author's field interview, dated 8/10/2009).

The second relevant dimension of leadership is decisiveness or authority, which involves the extent to which the leader takes firm decisions and pushes the GP members to get the GP's work done. The GP meeting minutes of Debipur GP convey an impression of the decisiveness and authority of this GP's leadership. For instance, in the minutes of the GP general body meetings held in 2008-09, there is frequent mention of GP decisions that require GP members to get certain tasks done "very quickly" (*ati*

satwar in Bengali). The minutes also show that the GP leadership has been seen to identify constituencies where tasks have not been completed, announce the names of those constituencies in the general body meeting, and order the members of the elected members representing such constituencies to complete the task within a certain time. In the GP meeting dated 22/09/2009, the names of ten constituencies which had failed to spend their respective share of the Untied fund and complete the assigned implementation tasks were announced (both ruling party and opposition constituencies were among such constituencies), as revealed in the record of GP meeting minutes. The representatives of such constituencies were told that if they did not complete the ongoing tasks within a week from the meetings's date, then the remaining fund share would be divided among the constituencies who had successfully completed the tasks. The *Pradhan*, as *Sabhapati* (chairperson) of GP general body meetings, deserves credit for the expression of GP authority and decisiveness in such meetings. The language seen in Nowdapanur GP's meeting minutes hardly conveys such impression of decisiveness, nor is there any mention of laggards being identified and pressurized. One rare item in the GP meeting minutes conveys an element of decisiveness:

It is decided to take up five schemes of afforestation under NREGA. Members are asked to submit maps of their respective constituencies within 10/08/2008, otherwise the schemes cannot be sent to higher authorities for approval (Minutes of GP meeting dated 29/07/2008).

The third aspect of leadership is stability and unity. Such stability is a factor contributing to the efficacy and authority of the GP's leadership. The tenure of Debipur GP's *Pradhan* has been stable and unchallenged ever since he assumed leadership. The strong majority of the ruling CPI (M)—which holds 85% of the GP's seats-- no doubt contributes to the stability of the *Pradhan*'s leadership. Furthermore, there is also evidence that even the opposition members of the GP respect him for his personal traits.

In the highly electorally competitive Nowdapanur GP, on the other hand, the *Pradhan*'s position has been contested and challenged. The *Pradhan* of the GP, who assumed office when the current GP was constituted, belonged not to the single largest party INC, but to a small party known as Muslim League which had extended its support to the INC that had failed to win a majority of GP seats in the May 2008 elections. In late 2009, however, the INC members in the GP passed a vote of no-confidence against the *Pradhan* and had him dismissed, on account of conflict over a political matter.¹¹⁶ This resulted in an INC member gaining the office of the *Pradhan*. Two independent GP members supported the INC and enabled it to obtain a majority in the GP council. One of the supporting independent members was rewarded with the position of *Upa-pradhan*. Even with the INC member assuming the *Pradhan* position and winning the support of a majority, the contestation and struggle over this position in Nowdapanur GP has apparently not ceased. An opposition member of Nowdapanur GP revealed that there is a continuing conflict happening among the elected representatives belonging to the ruling party INC, with one of them opposing the *Pradhan*'s leadership in an intra-party struggle (Author's field interview, dated 1/01/2010). On all three leadership dimensions of inclusiveness, decisiveness and unity/stability, therefore, Debipur GP shows superiority over Nowdapanur GP.

In the West Bengal context, it is not just the efforts of elected members and staff members, but also the efforts of GUSs that make up GP capacity. GUSs play an important role in supervising and overseeing the GP's implementation activities being carried out in their respective constituencies. In both the GPs, GUSs are actively

¹¹⁶When elections to constitute the Management Committee in a primary school in a particular village of Nowdanapur GP were held, the Muslim League requested right to contest two seats out of the total of six but their request was not fulfilled. The political parties AITC, CPI (M) and Muslim league joined forces against the INC to put pressure on it. The resulting anger on the part of the INC led to revenge by it. The INC members of the GP initiated a no-confidence motion against the GP's *Pradhan* (who belonged to Muslim League) and had him dismissed.

involved in playing such a role, as testified by the GUS secretaries and GP elected members. Nowdapanur GP, however, is at a relative disadvantage with respect to GUS contribution because GUSs could not be constituted in two of its constituencies owing to political conflict and incidents of violence. GUSs have been constituted in all the 17 constituencies of Debipur GP.

Apart from the skills and efforts of GP members and GP leadership, the other component of the GP's human resource capacity is the availability and quality of staff members. The number of staff members in both GPs was high. Both GPs, at the time of fieldwork, had an Executive Assistant, a Secretary, a *Nirman Sahayak* (who is a qualified engineer) and two *Sahayak* (administrative assistants) each. Debipur GP had a GP *karmee* to function as a peon and run errands while Nowdapanur GP did not have a GP *karmee*. In addition both GPs had a few staff members appointed on contract basis to perform specific tasks.

While there were no complaints from the elected representatives of Debipur GP regarding staff availability and quality, the *Pradhan* and the Secretary of Nowdapanur GP spoke about the need for more staff members to handle the huge and complex workload of the GP. The problem in Nowdapanur GP was not only the lack of GP *karmees*, but also that one of the *Sahayaks* was new and still learning her job, and one important staff member was not perceived of as being helpful or efficient by the elected representatives (Author's field interview with *Pradhan* of Nowdapanur GP, dated 18/12/2009). A large part of the burden therefore fell on the sincere and hardworking Secretary.

The problem in staff capacity, together with the poorer levels of involvement among elected members, adds up to the problem of overall poorer human resource capacity of Nowdapanur GP (as compared to Debipur GP). The lack of capacity is a

serious obstacle considering the huge workload and complex tasks of the GP. There was no significant difference between the two GPs as far as material resources such as equipment and premises were concerned: both GPs had already been computerized and possessed office buildings with several rooms at the time of fieldwork.

Financial management is also an element of GP capacity. As already stated in Chapter 2, the financial management of local governments existing in rural areas of countries such as India must be assessed in rudimentary, and not sophisticated, terms. Both GPs maintain basic financial records such as budgets and supplementary budgets, cash books, income-expenditure reports, annual action plans, and reports on the spending of financial allocations. Such maintenance can be significantly attributed to the fact that GPs not only have to undergo annual audits conducted by government auditors, but also have to regularly submit such records for approval by the higher tiers of government. Certain weaknesses in basic financial management were also seen in both GPs. The Audit Reports of both GPs (for the year 2007-08) identified that the budgets of both GPs were prepared, but budget estimates were not prepared on the basis of the income-expenditure records of the past three years, as per administrative rules. The Audit Reports also identified that both GPs were violating government rules related to spending: for instance, Debipur GP violated rules by spending Untied Fund money on maintenance of infrastructural assets, while Nowdapanur GP violated rules by spending Twelfth Finance Commission funds on new construction.

Preparing sound budgets is a challenging task for GPs, since funds are allocated by high tiers of government, and GPs lack control over fund sources. The Secretary of Nowdapanur GP commented that “The GP budget is just a facade, since government funds never tally with the budget estimates of the GP” (Author’s field interview, dated 18/12/2009). He revealed the incremental nature of budgeting by stating that financial

estimates were prepared by adding 10-15% to the income-expenditure estimates of the previous year. The GP meeting minutes of Debipur GP also mention that budget estimates for programmes such as IAY and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund did not match with the actual amount allotted by the government, as a result of which an amended budget had to be presented (minutes of GP meeting held on 19/2/2009). Given such constraints, continuous financial and strategic planning is more important than advanced planning embodied in the annual budget.

The author observed that both GPs were incorporating some elements of strategic planning to deal with the task of spending fund allocations which arrived from high levels of government. The infrastructure *Upa-samiti* head of Debipur GP revealed the seasonal considerations governing the taking up of infrastructural works, and the GP's strategic planning responses to the arrival of NREGA funds:

In the summer months, all pond excavation works under NREGA are taken up since ponds are dry. In the early autumn months, *morum* road works are easier to carry out, and are taken up. Therefore the underlying principle is that work is taken up that is possible to take up, given the circumstances and the amount of money available (Author's field interview with head of Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* of Debipur GP, dated 29/12/2009).

The head of the Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP shed light on strategic planning carried out in his GP to deal with the arrival of NREGA funds:

The *Nirman Sahayak* gives clever advice on the seasonal taking up of works. For example in March-June each year, a lot of NREGA works are completed, so that brick road works can be done in the Monsoon season. It must be remembered that subsequent fund allocations are conditional on earlier spending, therefore spending of earlier allocations is necessary for there to be sufficient funds for

later works (Author's telephonic interview with head of Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP, dated 20/05/2011).

While there are certain commonalities in financial management in both GP, as seen above, there are also certain differences between them. A perusal of the GP meeting minutes suggests that there is a more strategic and focused approach among Debipur GP's leadership towards managing funds, in addition to the already mentioned decisiveness in getting works done and money spent. Therefore there appears to be a link between the quality of leadership and the extent of fund utilization. Excerpts of items from Debipur GP's general body meeting minutes that convey a strategic and focused approach towards utilizing funds are given below:

Whatever Untied Fund money is available will be used for tube-well repair and road repair. For road repair, big constituencies will be given INR 10,000 each and small constituencies will be given INR 7000 each (names of big and small constituencies given) (Minutes of GP meeting dated 16/7/2008).

A decision is taken that as early as possible, *morum* road works under NREGA will be started in Sitarambati, Chhilinda, Amudpur and Maheshpur villages. After these works are done, bridge work in Mobarokpur village will be started (Minutes of GP meeting dated 5/1/1009).

With respect to the taking up of works under the Annual Action Plan of NREGA, it is decided that GP members have to select five works out of list of works for their respective constituencies, order them on priority basis, and send them to the GP office (Minutes of GP meeting dated 27/1/2009).

A strategic approach to spending was hardly conveyed in the GP meeting minutes of Nowdapanur GP. A few items of the meeting minutes of this GP convey a sense of focus (albeit dilute, in comparison to Debipur GP) in spending funds. One such item is given below:

In today's meeting, there was discussion on adoption of schemes and implementation of works for the utilization of unused BRGF funds. A scheme for the repair of a road in front of Sundipur SSK was adopted (Minutes of GP meeting dated 29/07/08).

While both GPs are involved in strategic planning for spending funds, Debipur GP exhibits a more strategic and focused approach to spending funds. It can also be recalled that Debipur GP has a much higher fund utilization rate than Nowdapanur GP. This indicates that Debipur GP has an edge as well as financial management is concerned.

The ability to utilize available funds depends, to a significant extent, on systematic and pro-active planning by GP elected members (using the expert advice of staff members). Such planning assumes special significance because of the presence of rule-based constraints - for instance, GPs can only use Untied Funds for new construction activities, and Twelfth Finance Commission Funds only for repair. Active interest among a majority of elected members (representing different constituencies), and a commitment among them to optimally utilize available GP funds in a productive way, would surely have a positive impact on the GP's extent of fund utilization. The inflow of a variety of suggestions from elected members (regarding how to utilize the available funds) at the decision making stage of selection of works for implementation, would improve a GP's ability to productively utilize funds, in the context of rule-based constraints on GP spending. Therefore, inclusiveness of decision making, leadership, the extent of elected members' contribution, and the expertise of staff members all have an important bearing on the GP's ability to strategically manage and utilize available funds. GP members need to smartly carry out planning and implementation to effectively utilize available funds, and to this end, they should inculcate skills (not just through training but by actually doing i.e. learning by involving themselves in GP

work). This kind of capacity would possibly have positive pay-offs for fund utilization, thus improving the performance of GPs.

Therefore, Debipur GP does better than Nowdapanur GP on capacity components such as efforts and contributions of elected members, staff availability, strategic management of funds, and leadership. There is no appreciable difference on the remaining element of capacity, material capacity. Debipur GP thus has overall higher capacity than Nowdapanur GP.

Secondary Determinant

The preferences of decision makers constitute a secondary determinant of GP performance. This determinant also affects GP performance, though its role in explaining variations in performance between GPs is less obvious and fundamental than that of the primary determinants.

Preferences of Decision Makers

The preferences of decision makers at the GP level and also at the higher levels of *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* have a subtle impact on GP performance. The impact of the preferences of GP decision makers is first elaborated, followed by the impact of the preferences of the higher-level decision makers.

As already stated, popular demands made by the deliberative forum of *Gram Sansad* are filtered by being subjected to discretionary decision making by the GP. GPs exercise discretion in selecting works for implementation from the list of *Gram Sansad* demands. Greater inclusiveness in such selection leads to less arbitrariness in the selection of demands for fulfilment and results in fairer assessment of the relative importance of different demands. This in turn, possibly contributes to greater levels of

popular satisfaction with GP service delivery. As already seen, the decision making processes used in Debipur GP are conducive to greater inclusiveness in decision making, compared to those in Nowdapanur GP.

There is evidence of positive outcomes created by the greater inclusiveness of decision making in Debipur GP. Such evidence pertains to the representation of opposition constituencies in the works carried out by Debipur GP in its different constituencies. As already seen, the NREGA output data for Debipur GP show that there was relatively fairer representation of opposition constituencies among all the areas in which works were carried out, than in Nowdapanur GP. In spite of particular instances of discrimination alleged by opposition representatives, the ruling party of Debipur GP does carry out a fair proportion of works in opposition areas. In spite of the overwhelming dominance of the ruling party in Debipur GP, there is a greater degree of inclusiveness in decision making in this GP compared to Nowdapanur GP, leading to a fairer representation of opposition areas in works done by it

The responsiveness of the higher tiers of *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* towards the demands of the GPs has a bearing on GP performance. The *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* can help the GP by using their own funds to take up projects located in a single GP or across GPs, or by financing or implementing 'large' projects that are above the spending limit of the GP. Such assistance contributes to the better availability or quality of infrastructural assets such as roads and tube-wells in the GP area, and thus increases satisfaction of villagers with these assets. The preferences of the decision makers at these higher levels naturally influence their responsiveness towards the demands of GPs.

The responsiveness of the higher level decision makers can be assessed on the basis of the perception of the GP members about them. The GP office holders

(specifically the *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads) interviewed in Debipur GP expressed a generally positive perception of Memari-I *Panchayat Samiti* and Burdwan *Zilla Parishad*. The *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads all expressed satisfaction with the assistance being received from these higher tiers. The *Pradhan* clarified that while GP demands were sometimes delayed for fulfilment, they were never rejected (Author's field interview, dated 14/09/2009).

In Nowdapanur GP, however, the *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads expressed a negative perception of Berhampore *Panchayat Samiti* and Murshidabad *Zilla Parishad* (especially the *Zilla Parishad*). The *Pradhan* of Nowdapanur GP expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of funds given by the *Zilla Parishad* for works in his GP (Author's field interview, dated 18/09/2009) whereas the infrastructure and education and public health *Upa-samiti* heads complained that the *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* members do not give any importance to GP members (Author's field interviews with heads of Infrastructure *Upa-samiti* and Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP, dated 7/1/2010 and 6/1/2010 respectively) .

It is important to note that the ruling party in Debipur GP as well as its corresponding *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* levels--the CPI (M)--is the same. For Nowdapanur GP, however, the situation is different: while the INC is the ruling party in both the GP and the *Panchayat Samiti*, the ruling party in the *Zilla Parishad* is the CPI (M). The Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* head of Nowdapanur GP expressed that he found it relatively easier to approach and obtain benefits from the *Panchayat Samiti* decision makers since they were from the same party as his, i.e. INC (Author's telephonic interview, dated 20/05/2011). Therefore GPs find it easier to have

their demands fulfilled by higher tiers when these are controlled by the same political party.¹¹⁷

The support received by Debipur GP from its higher tiers facilitates the taking up of additional projects in the area of Debipur GP, and this contributes to the better quality and availability of infrastructural assets. Nowdapanur GP however suffers in this respect due to the lack of support from the *Zilla Parishad*. For Nowdapanur GP, support from higher levels is critical because of its more acute fund shortage: for instance this GP often finds itself unable to take up repair of cylinder tube-wells which is very costly, and depends on the *Zilla Parishad* for bearing such expenses (Author's field interview with head of Education and Public Health *Upa-samiti* of Nowdapanur GP, dated 6/01/2010). Given such a situation of dependence, discrimination by the *Zilla Parishad* seems to be detrimental to the GP's attempts to satisfy people's needs.

In addition to preferences of decision makers, upward accountability might also possibly be having an impact on GP performance and a subtle role in explaining performance variation between GPs. Upward accountability refers to the control exercised on GPs by their higher tiers, especially their respective block and district level authorities. GPs have to regularly and frequently report to the higher authorities (especially to the Executive Officer of the *Panchayat Samiti*) all details of implementation work done on central and state government programmes. Funding given by the higher levels is conditional on the receipt of the required reports from the GP, and also (for programmes such as NREGA and BRGF), total utilization of the earlier allocation within a stipulated time period. GPs are thus kept on their toes by the higher levels of government and such control very likely affects fund utilization by

¹¹⁷Interviews with bureaucrats in the Memari-I and Berhampore block offices revealed that political considerations do play a role behind the decisions of the *Panchayat Samiti*. A bureaucratic official from Berhampore block revealed that demands coming from a particular GP may be rejected by *Panchayat Samiti* when different political parties rule in the *Panchayat Samiti* and the concerned GP (Author's field interview, dated 8/12/2009).

GPs. Oversight by the higher levels is taken seriously by GPs, given that such oversight is backed by the sanctioning power of the higher levels of government.

Upward accountability of GPs, therefore, is a factor affecting GP performance. While both chosen GPs are subjected to extensive control from their respective block and district authorities, the actual variation in the extent of upward accountability between the two GPs is difficult to detect. The inability to detect such variation is a limitation of this study. No inference is made in this study about such variation and the extent of its impact on fund utilization and GP performance.

Conclusion

The findings of the West Bengal study show that the GP with higher overall performance--Debipur GP--has a lower level of overall accountability. The GP with better performance is seen to possess much higher financial strength and higher capacity. Table 28 shows the association between each of these determinants and performance.

Table 28: Association between Performance Determinants and Performance in the West Bengal Study

<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Performance	Determinants of performance		
		Accountability	Financial Strength	Capacity
Debipur GP	Higher	Lower	Higher	Higher
Nowdapanur GP	Lower	Higher	Lower	Lower

Source: Analysis and inference carried out by the author

The study findings show that financial strength and capacity are critical to better GP performance, and the latter is even more significant. Higher capacity explains, to a large extent, why Debipur GP was able to utilize its financial resources in a better way

to achieve better performance. Secondary variables such as favourable preferences of decision makers subtly contribute to the better performance of Debipur GP.

Given that the GP with higher accountability has worse performance, it is pertinent to ask what explains the ineffectiveness of accountability in inducing better performance. One reason behind such ineffectiveness is the failure of the actual functioning of accountability mechanisms to fulfil the conditions (causal processes) through which they could have had an impact on performance. The cumulative failure of accountability to have a notable impact on performance in the chosen GPs can be attributed to the failure of all the three types of accountability mechanisms (deliberative, monitoring and sanctioning) to improve performance, as already seen in this chapter.

However, the single most important factor responsible for such failure is the shortcoming seen in the functioning of the sanctioning mechanism (elections). More competitive elections in Nowdapanur GP fail to push their members to be more seriously involved in the work of the GP, and thus fail to improve GP performance. This is happening mainly because the selection of GP members in such elections is not based on performance considerations.

The concrete possibility of performance-based sanctioning of functionaries is necessary for accountability to have a decisive impact on performance. In other words, the concerned functionary should have a desire of being re-elected, and feel a concrete threat of being thrown out of office if he/she fails to perform well. This can be illustrated through an analogy related to the accountability-performance relationship for a particular type of functionaries— alternative primary school (SSK) teachers. The provided illustration is not about GP accountability or performance, but can shed

insights on the accountability-performance relationship that can be applied to any service-providing functionary, including GP members.

SSK teachers (*Sahayikas*) are generally found to be better performing than their mainstream primary school counterparts in terms of their higher sincerity, closeness with students and lower absenteeism.¹¹⁸ The accountability of *Sahayikas* has a positive impact on their performance. *Sahayikas* are subjected to monitoring mechanisms such as regular mothers' meetings and monthly reporting to the block administration, which leads to regular oversight of their performance. However, the crucial factor that results in such accountability having a direct impact on performance is the contract-based or temporary appointment of these teachers, compared to the permanent appointment of mainstream primary school teachers.¹¹⁹ *Sahayikas* therefore face concrete pressure to perform well, under the fear that vigilant parents and/or the Management Committee of the SSK will detect their shortcomings. This might lead to the Management Committee bringing about the removal of the errant *Sahayika*. As a result work, *Sahayikas* work harder and perform more sincerely in spite of their much poorer remuneration.¹²⁰

The significance of accountability as a determinant of SSK teacher performance is therefore linked to the opportunities to sanction them because of their contractual or temporary tenure, and the linking of performance failures to such sanctioning.

¹¹⁸There is a general perception that SSK teachers usually perform more seriously than mainstream primary school teachers. This was also highlighted by Education *Karmadhyaksha* of Burdwan *Zilla Parishad* (Author's field interview, dated 7/10/2009). A *Sahayika* of Punnyagram SSK of Debipur GP told the author that a lot of students leave nearby mainstream primary schools and join SSKs, attracted by the quality of SSK teaching (Author's field interview, dated 5/10/2009). The literature also highlights the better performance of SSK teachers compared to mainstream primary school teachers (Rana, Rafique, and Sengupta 2002). See Chapter 2 for details.

¹¹⁹*Sahayikas* can enjoy their tenure as long as the Management Committee of the SSK wishes. Only the Management Committee of the SSK has been given the power to recommend removal of *Sahayikas*. The Management Committee consists of seven parent representatives, a GP member and a *Panchayat Samiti* nominee. The actual removal of *Sahayikas* is done by the *Panchayat Samiti* (Government of West Bengal 2008c). The Management Committee may also appoint *Sahayikas* on an annual contractual basis (Government of West Bengal 2004).

¹²⁰The author is grateful to the Education *Karmadhyakshas* of Memari-I *Panchayat Samiti* and Burdwan *Zilla Parishad* for revealing the significance of contract-based or temporary appointment of *Sahayikas* as a determinant of their performance (Author's field interviews, dated 7/10/2009 and 12/10/2009). Such significance is also highlighted in the literature by Rana et al. (2003).

Similarly, GP accountability could be effective in improving GP performance if the functioning of sanctioning mechanisms (elections) could be linked to performance considerations. The concrete threat of removal of the ruling group and GP members based on performance considerations could have improved the efforts put in by them, thus bringing about a certain degree of improvement in GP performance. 'Performance considerations' refers to voters' consideration of overall GP performance and their consideration of the individual effort of the concerned GP member.¹²¹

At the level of the ruling group of the GP, effective accountability pressures resulting from the possibility of electoral defeat of the incumbent ruling party linked to overall GP performance, would push the ruling group to increase its cumulative effort towards improving GP performance. At the level of individual GP members, effective accountability pressures from elections (linking re-election of individual GP members to overall GP performance and their individual contribution and effort) would compel them to increase their efforts towards the overall functioning of the GP. If such pressure could be effectively applied to all or most GP members (especially the important functionaries such as *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads), their efforts would increase as a result, and the capacity of the GP would go up, resulting in an improvement of aggregate GP performance. However, as already seen, the sanctioning mechanism of elections fails to induce performance improvements because voting in reality is based on non-performance considerations such as kinship and money power of contesting incumbents. It must be noted that performance-based sanctioning will succeed in pushing elected representatives of GPs to step up their efforts only if they have the true desire or interest to be re-elected. Furthermore, villagers have to notice the performance

¹²¹ Some may argue that it is not fair to hold individual GP members answerable for overall GP performance. However it cannot be denied that GP members belonging to the ruling party or coalition (and especially the office holders such as *Pradhan* and *Upa-samiti* heads) are individually responsible for performing the duties of their position, and collectively responsible for the functioning of the GP.

contributions of the representatives and give due importance to such contributions. Therefore, this condition, though fundamental for accountability to have a significant impact on GP performance, is actually quite difficult to fulfil.

Having stated the importance of performance-based sanctioning, it is important to clarify that this condition, by itself, might not result in improvement of performance beyond a certain extent. Improvements in other crucial performance determinants such as capacity and finances are indispensable for more far-reaching performance improvements to happen. After all, GPs perform complex and multi-faceted tasks, for which ample finances and capacity are indispensable. The analogy with SSK teachers is therefore relevant only to a certain extent.

Accountability (specifically sanctioning) pressures can push up the capacity of a GP by increasing the efforts of GP members. However, as seen in the case of Debipur GP, this particular component of GP capacity (higher level of effort from elected members) can also be shaped by factors other than accountability pressures. The level of effort from individual elected members is relatively higher in Debipur GP (compared to Nowdapanur GP), even though its level of accountability is relatively lower, and it did not experience any electoral defeat of incumbent representatives. Effective accountability pressures, that meet the condition of performance-based sanctioning, may however push capacity up from previously lower levels within a particular GP (like Nowdapanur GP) by compelling elected members to increase their efforts.

Aggregate capacity consists of not only the skills and efforts of the elected members, but also the quality and availability of staff members: these capacity components are independent of accountability pressures. The impact of accountability, by itself, is therefore likely to push up the performance of a GP only to a certain level. The importance of the availability of an adequate level of capacity and finances for

achieving high performance levels remains. Nowdapanur GP would very likely be unable to match up to Debipur GP's performance without an improved availability of finances and capacity. Capacity is especially important because it is critical for effective utilization of available finances. When the capacity and financial strength of a local government are at a poor level, accountability pressures can improve performance only to a limited extent.

It is therefore inferred in the West Bengal study that accountability mechanisms are creating a degree of popular control in the chosen West Bengal GPs, but such control is not having an impact on performance. What indeed is the nature of pressure or control exercised by villagers, and what are the reasons for its limited effectiveness? More qualitative insights can shed light on this complex question, going beyond the analysis of the impact of specific formal accountability mechanisms. Some such insights are shared below.

It is interesting to see what residents of the two GPs demand from their respective GPs, and whether they obtain what they ask for. An analysis of villager survey responses for the two GPs revealed the following: In Debipur GP, only four out of sixteen villager survey respondents stated that they had never demanded anything from the GP. In Nowdapanur GP, only three out of sixteen respondents stated that they had never demanded anything from the GP. This seems to show that people are active in demanding things from the GP, and therefore there is a lot of popular pressure on GPs.

However, further analysis of the villager survey responses reveals that the demands that the respondents of both GPs made were mostly for individual welfare benefits for themselves or their family members, such as IAY money for house construction, employment under NREGA, monetary benefit for pregnant women under the government programme known as *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, BPL status that could

make them eligible for various welfare benefits, old age pension, widow pension, and ration card. Some of these demands were fulfilled, while others were not. Not all individual demands were for welfare benefits; a few were for infrastructural assets in the respondent's locality. One subject in Debipur GP demanded and obtained a tap for his locality¹²² (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Debipur GP, dated 19/09/2009), while a female subject in Nowdapanur GP demanded a tubewell for her locality (Author's field interview with female, SC villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009). Only a few respondents had asked for slightly wider benefits: A female subject in Nowdapanur GP, who leads an SHG, requested land for setting up an office for running her SHG (Author's field interview with female, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 2/01/2010). One affluent, educated subject, who belongs to the INC and is a GUS member in a particular constituency of Nowdapanur GP, had requested a brick road for his village, and also frequently makes demands for welfare benefits on behalf of poor villagers (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent of Nowdapanur GP, dated 5/01/2010).

Elected representatives perceive a high degree of popular pressure because of high demand for personal benefits. The spouse of a female GP member of Nowdapanur GP belonging to the opposition party CPI (M) commented, "Popular pressure has definitely been created". He added that available benefits were limited in number, while the demands far exceeded the available benefits in magnitude. He went on to say, "Poor people are now aware about the available benefits, and are vocal in asking for these, Therefore some people are criticizing their elected representatives, while others, who got benefits, are happy" (Author's field interview, dated 5/01/2010).

¹²² While demands for taps may be expressed in *Gram Sansad* meetings or presented to GP members, the GP itself cannot fulfil such demands, since taps, unlike tube-wells and roads, can only be provided by the higher tiers of government. The GP has to channelize demands for taps to the higher tiers for fulfilment.

As seen above, personal demands for welfare benefits are pre-dominant among the things that people demand from their GPs. However, the reality is that the GP has little autonomous authority in providing these benefits. The GP's role is merely to channelize applications and demands for welfare benefits to higher tiers such as the block-level and district level administration, which have decision making powers in this respect. Furthermore, eligibility for benefits of these welfare programmes is determined by certain procedural stipulations such as BPL status and score obtained in the Rural Household Survey, over which the GP has no control.

There is further evidence that villagers are holding the GP responsible pre-dominantly for the benefits distributed under government welfare programmes, over which the GPs have little control. As seen in Chapter 6, villagers' overall satisfaction with overall GP performance is associated with their beneficiary status. Villagers seem to be happiest with GP performance when their demands for personal benefits (specifically personal pensions) are met.

The individualized nature of popular pressure is also reflected in the functioning of formal accountability mechanisms. Insights obtained from Chapter 4 showed that the deliberative body of *Gram Sansad* is a forum for making personal demands for welfare benefits and infrastructural assets, rather than for exerting collective pressure or rationally debating governance issues. Individual demands are prominent in questions asked and proposals made in *Gram Sansad* meetings. The prevalence of clientelism as a voting consideration in GP elections is also a manifestation of the culture of giving precedence to individual benefits. A comment made by a GUS Secretary in Nowdapanur GP neatly sums up the apparent situation: "There is no collective or organized pressure but only individual pressure for personal demands" (Author's field

interview with GUS Secretary of Soluadanga constituency of Nowdapanur GP, dated 5/01/2010).

While the predominance of individual pressure is an evident reality, it is not entirely correct to say that collective pressure is completely absent. It would rather be more accurate to say that collective pressure is rare. It has already been seen that there have been instances when villagers have presented mass petitions for the improvement of roads, and have even participated in election boycotts to protest over the poor state of roads. However, it must be noted that such collective mobilization is only occasional and difficult to achieve: For instance, the mass movement for demanding the improvement of the Badshahi Sadak in Sripurdanga village of Nowdapanur GP experienced initial failure since villagers, because of differences in political affiliation, had initially failed to unite and present a mass petition to the Member of Parliament for their area (Author's field interview with GUS Secretary of Sripurdanga constituency of Nowdapanur GP, dated 19/12/2009).

It was also observed that education is an area of low priority as far as popular demand and pressure are concerned. There seems to be a hierarchy of significance as far as popular pressure is concerned: the item of greatest priority is personal benefits of welfare programmes, though pressure for such demands is necessarily individual-based and fragmented. The middle tier in the hierarchy is pressure for improving infrastructure such as roads, which occasionally takes the form of collective pressure. Such instances of collective pressurization are, however, not regular or frequent, since collective mobilization is difficult to achieve. The lowest tier, which represents the lowest area of priority for the people is the improvement of facilities in educational institutions. The significance of education in generating long term development gains,

and the importance of providing proper facilities for education, have not yet registered in people's psyche.¹²³

The above account shows that certain characteristics of popular pressure - the predominantly individual nature of popular pressure, people's holding GPs responsible for decisions over which the GP has little control, and the low priority given by people to important development needs such as education- possibly constrain the impact of popular pressure on performance. Such characteristics of popular pressure are likely to inhibit the efficacy of popular pressure in having a positive impact on GP performance.

Having seen the findings about the determinants of performance and the relationship between accountability and performance for the West Bengal study, one may raise concerns about the generalizability of these findings. The next chapter will explore the relationship between accountability and performance, and the determinants of GP performance for the chosen cases in Madhya Pradesh to take this study towards a conclusion based on the findings of the two state studies.

¹²³While the earlier mentioned instances of collective action for infrastructural improvement were directed not at the GP but at higher tiers, the observation that popular pressure is more intense for improvement of infrastructural assets than for improvement of educational facilities appears to be applicable to the GP level as well. The demands presented by the villager survey respondents of both GPs to their respective GPs pertained only to individual welfare benefits and infrastructural amenities such as tube-wells and taps for their neighbourhoods. No such demand pertained to improvement of school facilities.

CHAPTER 8

EXAMINING THE ACCOUNTABILITY-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP FOR THE MADHYA PRADESH STUDY

Chapters 5 and 6 assessed the variation in accountability and performance between the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh. The goal of this chapter is to infer the accountability-performance relationship for the Madhya Pradesh study, considering not only the variation in the levels of accountability and performance between the two chosen GPs, but also the operation of causal processes between the two variables.

The structure of this chapter is similar to that of Chapter 7. The first section assesses the impact of accountability on performance. The second section examines the impact of possible performance determinants – both primary and secondary - other than accountability. The conclusion infers whether it is accountability, or other performance determinants, that actually explain variation in performance between the two GPs, and follows this inference with a final analysis of the accountability-performance relationship for the Madhya Pradesh study.

The Impact of Accountability on Performance

The impact of accountability on GP performance is assessed in this section. Firstly, there is an examination of the impact of each accountability dimension on GP performance. Secondly, the relationship between accountability and GP performance in each functional area (infrastructure and alternative primary education) is assessed. Finally, the overall relationship between accountability and performance is inferred, on the basis of the findings from the comparative study, and the evidence of causal processes between accountability and performance.

Impact of Different Accountability Dimensions on Performance

The impact of the three dimensions of accountability—sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring—is assessed below. In exploring the impact of each dimension on GP performance, there is consideration of the association between the concerned dimension and performance (as revealed by the inter-GP comparison) and the evaluation of the causal impact of the accountability mechanism corresponding to that dimension, on relevant aspects of GP performance.

Sanctioning Dimension

Among the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh, it is Ramgarh GP that has done better on the sanctioning dimension of accountability, by virtue of its more competitive elections. But is such higher electoral competition having a positive impact on GP performance? The inter-GP comparison shows that Ramgarh GP has worse performance than the GP which did worse on the sanctioning dimension of accountability (Goutampur Colony GP). Therefore, the sanctioning dimension of accountability is not responsible for the better performance of Goutampur Colony GP.

While Ramgarh GP has higher electoral competition, the required causal processes between competitive elections and performance do not operate in this GP. This explains why its competitive elections are not able to improve its performance. The actual operation of the causal processes between electoral competition and performance in the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs is assessed below, according to the benchmark of the causal processes hypothesized in Chapter 1.

The primary hypothesis about the impact of electoral competition on performance is that higher electoral competition can improve GP performance through the increased opportunity to sanction (punish) incumbent representatives. A high

degree of electoral defeat of incumbents who contest re-elections would compel sitting individual representatives to increase their efforts towards improving GP performance. Three conditions are necessary for this hypothesis to become reality: first, some incumbent representatives must contest re-election; secondly, there has to be a fairly high degree of defeat of incumbent representatives standing for re-election and thirdly, the defeat of incumbent representatives has to be linked to performance considerations (that is, the contribution of the incumbents to the work of the GP). In Ramgarh GP, the GP with more competitive GP elections, the first condition itself (that is, incumbent representatives standing for re-election) was not fulfilled, therefore the question of the fulfilment of the other two conditions does not arise. As seen in Chapter 5, none of the incumbent GP members contested re-election in 2010. When incumbent GP members do not contest re-elections, they do not feel the compulsion to perform well. This in turn has an adverse impact on GP performance. Furthermore, because of the absence of party-based elections, there is no such thing as a coherent ruling group or party that desires to retain power in the next elections even if individual incumbents change. Thus, there is no pressure on the GP *Sarpanch* or *Panchas* created by the possibility of turnover of the ruling group through competitive elections.

When the possibility of the defeat of incumbent representatives in re-elections is non-existent, competitive elections can still possibly have a positive impact on GP performance: this can be achieved when competitive elections lead to the selection of only responsible and competent candidates and rejection of the rest. However even this condition is not satisfied with respect to *Sarpanch* and *Panch* elections in Ramgarh GP. As far as the *Sarpanch* election is concerned, it seems that voters in Ramgarh GP are mainly driven by their village-based loyalties rather than by an assessment of the qualities of the candidates. The *Sarpanch* election of 2010 was seen as an inter-village

contest by the villagers of this GP, rather than as a contest to elect the most competent candidate. The low degree of involvement of most *Panchas* in the work of Ramgarh GP shows that committed and serious candidates are rarely chosen as *Panchas*. The interest in contesting *Panch* elections in this GP (though relatively higher than in Goutampur Colony GP) also appears to be low, as evident in the fact that as many as eight out of fourteen *Panch* positions of this GP were filled in an uncontested manner in 2010, and one seat remained vacant. The low perceived importance of *Panch* positions is leading to low interest in contesting *Panch* elections. It is unlikely that talented or skilled candidates are attracted to contest GP elections, given that *Panch* positions are not perceived as being particularly attractive.

Another hypothesis about the impact of electoral competition on performance is that electoral competition brings about a significant and assertive opposition, which in turn can keep the ruling party alert to its shortcomings, and thus improve performance. Such oversight can take forms such as detection of corruption and wrongdoings, and drawing of attention to various performance failures. The impact of opposition on GP performance, however, can be forthcoming only when a coherent opposition exists in the first place. In Madhya Pradesh GPs, a coherent opposition is not easily identifiable because GP elections are not contested not a party basis. This hinders, to great extent, the emergence of an organized group-based opposition.

The legal basis of opposition in Madhya Pradesh GPs is individual based. Such individual based opposition is likely to be highly fragmented, and therefore, not a source of effective pressure on the *Sarpanch*. As per Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, individual *Panchas* have been given a power known as the right of *sankalp*. According to this right, if individual *Panchas* feel that the GP's work is not being done properly, then they may table a proposal in the GP meeting suggesting measures for the

correction of the defects. The GP is obliged to discuss the tabled proposal and the proposal shall be adopted as the decision of the GP if it passed by a majority of all GP members. *Panchas* have also been given the power of *dhyan-akarshan* (drawing of attention) for placing desired topics on the agenda of GP meetings, or to seek clarification or information on any aspect of GP functioning (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2005, 2010).

In spite of the legal constraints that prevent the emergence of a group-based opposition, there was a possibility of the formation of a group-based opposition in Ramgarh GP. The inter-village divide accentuated by the highly competitive *Sarpanch* elections did create the possibility of a village-based opposition in Ramgarh GP. The opinions of the *Panchas* of this GP also reflect the village-based divide. In spite of the presence of such inter-village divide, the low actual interest, involvement and assertiveness of most *Panchas* is negating the benefits of opposition presence such as vigilance and exerting of effective pressure on the *Sarpanch*. There is no evidence that Ramgarh GP's 'opposition' is more assertive or effective than that of Goutampur Colony GP.

While the common sense view is that the presence of an opposition is the result of competitive elections, the findings of this study show that the presence of opposition is not entirely linked to the competitiveness of elections in Madhya Pradesh GPs. In other words, it is not necessary that a GP with entirely uncontested elections will lack an opposition. In Goutampur Colony GP, as seen in Chapter 5, the current GP has been constituted entirely through uncontested selection of elected representatives (*Sarpanch and Panchas*). The previous GP (2005-10) too had 90% of its *Panchas* chosen through uncontested selection. Such a situation leads one to expect that there will be no such thing as an 'opposition' in the GP. The Secretary of this GP however divulged that the

ruler-opposition divide is a permanent state of affairs in the GP, even when the GP is constituted entirely in an uncontested manner. All the *Panchas* are opposition members in Goutampur Colony GP (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 11/06/2011).¹²⁴ Interviews with individual *Panchas* of the previous GP of Goutampur Colony (2005-10) also affirmed the existence of the ruler-opposition divide, and revealed attitudes of dissatisfaction among these members with respect to the *Sarpanch*, Secretary and the GP as a whole. Each *Panch* pressurizes the *Sarpanch* to take up development works in his/her respective constituency: this also brings out that the opposition is not a coherent or organized group here, but is in fact characterized by competition among all the opposition actors (*Panchas*) for resource allocation.

The hypotheses that propose positive impacts of electoral competition on local government performance therefore fail to be empirically borne out in the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs. The evidence shows that the causal processes, which could have brought about the positive impact of electoral competition on GP performance, are actually not operating. The results of inter-GP comparison can also shed light on the relationship between the sanctioning dimension of accountability and GP performance. As already seen, the GP that is assessed as better on the sanctioning dimension of accountability (by virtue of having more competitive elections)—Ramgarh GP—has worse performance than the GP which lagged behind on the sanctioning dimension (Goutampur Colony GP). The implication of this finding is that the popular control created by competitive elections in the GP that has higher electoral competitiveness (Ramgarh GP) is not able to induce higher performance than in the other GP. The

¹²⁴The author also observed that the *Panchas* keep asking the *Sarpanch* to do something about the problems of their villages and constituencies. The CEO (JP) of Obaidullahgunj *Janpad Panchayat* also revealed that the accusatory stance employed by *Panchas* towards the *Sarpanch* is a common scenario in GPs (Author's field interview, dated 18/03/2010).

sanctioning dimension of accountability therefore fails to have a significant impact on GP performance.

Deliberation Dimension

The hypothesis that emerged from the literature is that the higher effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism of accountability leads to better performance (in terms of a higher extent of fulfilment of popular demands) because of a superior inflow of popular inputs. This hypothesis creates an expectation of a high level of congruence between popular demands and actual service delivery resulting from the operation of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha*.

A perusal of Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law (that lays down the binding nature of the decisions of the deliberative forum of *Gram Sabha*) creates an expectation that all popular demands made by *Gram Sabha* are actually fulfilled by the GP. In reality, however, only a small portion of *Gram Sabha* proposals are taken up for implementation or actually implemented. In Goutampur Colony GP, for example, there were 42 works in the NREGA Action Plan (which is also the list of *Gram Sabha* proposals for NREGA works) for 2008-09, of which only four have been taken up till date and only two have been completed. There were five road works in the NREGA Action Plan of Ramgarh GP for 2009-10, but only one was completed in the same year.

The decision of the deliberative forum known as *Gram Sabha* embodies the Action Plan--the list of targeted works of a GP--for the concerned year. In Madhya Pradesh GPs, these lists contain an imperfect expression of popular demand because the GP dominates the preparation of these lists (see Chapter 5). Whatever popular demand or popular need is embodied in these lists is further constrained by being made to pass through various layers of decision making before finding fruition in actual outputs.

These stages of decision making are - approval of Action Plans (list of *Gram Sabha* proposals) by higher levels, selecting of specific works for implementation, approval of each selected work by the higher tiers, and actual implementation of each selected work for which money has arrived from the higher tiers. The work proposals contained in the Action Plan are thus subjected to filtering in successive layers of decision making. Furthermore, preferences of decision makers affect the passage of these proposals through these layers. It is at the stage of selection of particular works for implementation (among all the works listed in the action plan) that the impact of decision makers' preferences is most significant.

GPs select particular works for implementation out of all the works in the Action Plan, not necessarily adhering to the order of priority stated in the *Gram Sabha*-approved Action Plan. The Secretaries of both GPs mentioned that the preferences of the *Gram Sabha* are considered in the selection of works. The Secretary of Ramgarh GP revealed that in some instances it is not possible to accommodate the requests of *Gram Sabha* for selecting a particular work, since funds are in limited supply; in such an event, the *Gram Sabha* is accordingly informed that its requests would be considered the next time that funds arrived (Author's telephonic interview, dated 11/06/2011).

The accounts given by Secretaries of the two GPs makes it seem that neutral considerations such as 'urgency of need' 'fund availability' and 'preferences of *Gram Sabha*' are the only ones affecting decision making. The opinions of *Panchas* in the two GPs, however, point to a perception among them that certain villages in a GP are discriminated against in the GP's work selection, and consequently suffer from relative backwardness.

In Goutampur Colony GP, *Panchas* belonging to the villages of Goutampur Tola, Kesalwada and Jondra (more backward than the largest village of Goutampur

Colony) expressed complaints about the responsiveness of the *Sarpanch*, Secretary and the GP towards the needs of their respective villages. A village resident also complained of village-based bias in demand fulfilment. These perceptions are presented below:

I expressed the grievances of my village to the GP, but the *Sarpanch* and Secretary did not do anything. The *Sarpanch* only comes to the matter of votes (is only interested in votes, and helping people who voted for him)...Kesalwada is more neglected and backward than the other villages of this GP. Handpumps (tube-wells) here lie unrepaired for months, but the *Sarpanch* and Secretary do not pay any heed (Author's field interview with former Goutampur Colony GP *Panch* representing Kesalwada, dated 25/03/2010).

We are not getting enough co-operation from the GP. The GP says, no matter how much we scream, nothing can be done. Work will be done only if the *Sarpanch* and Secretary co-operate (Author's field interview with former Goutampur Colony GP *Panch* representing Goutampur Tola, dated 25/03/2010).

The attitude of the Secretary is problematic; he does not listen to what people need. There is no co-operation from the *Sarpanch* either (Author's field interview with former Goutampur Colony GP *Panch* representing Jondra, dated 28/03/2010).

The GP fulfils popular demands only of Goutampur Colony village, not of Goutampur Tola (Author's interview with male, ST villager survey respondent residing in Goutampur Tola, dated 22/03/2010).

The situation in Ramgarh GP was also similar. An analysis of the interview responses of the former and current *Panchas* of this GP show that *Panchas* expect development works to be done in their respective villages only when their *Sarpanch* belongs to the same village. Furthermore, they blame a *Sarpanch* belonging to a different village for development works not done in their village. Village residents express beliefs similar to those of the *Panchas*.¹²⁵ Some views of *Panchas* and villagers belonging to different villages of this GP are quoted below:

The reason why the needs of our village remained unfulfilled till date is that the former *Sarpanch* belonged to a different village, and he did not do anything for Neenaur village (Author's field interview with a current *Panch* of Ramgarh GP representing Neenaur village, dated 3/04/2010).

The biggest obstacle hindering the satisfaction of the needs of Ramgarh village is that the new *Sarpanch* is of the *vipaksh* (opponent's side). I have no hope that the next five years will bring any development because the *Sarpanch* is of the *vipaksh*. (Author's field interview with husband of current *Panch* of Ramgarh GP, representing Ramgarh village, dated 5/04/2010).

There was no development work done at all till the new GP was elected (in 2010). The previous *Sarpanch* got only around 15 or 16 votes from my village when he was elected, and therefore he did not care about this village (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP residing in Bawdikheda village, dated 05/04/2010).

¹²⁵The predominant inter-village conflict in this GP is between Neenaur and Ramgarh villages. The position of the remaining village of Bawdikheda, vis-a-vis this conflict is ambiguous. However, one village resident belonging to Bawdikheda blamed the former *Sarpanch* belonging to Ramgarh village for the lack of development in his village, and was hopeful that the new *Sarpanch* belonging to Neenaur and the new *Up-sarpanch* belonging to his village Bawdikheda would do well in meeting the needs of his village (Author's field interview of male, SC villager survey respondent of Ramgarh GP, dated 5/04/2010).

The above stated interview responses from both GPs indicate that considerations governing the selection of works are possibly not always neutral. These responses indicate that allocation of works among constituencies is not always equitable, and village-based loyalties and political considerations (such as whether the *Sarpanch* got a significant number of votes from a particular village) play a likely role in influencing the selection of works. In Goutampur Colony GP, however, the actual output figures (for non-NREGA works) for 2008-09 show that road repair and construction works were taken up not only in the largest village of Goutampur Colony, but also in Jondra and Kesalwada. In spite of this, there is persistent discontent among the *Panchas* of these smaller and more backward villages. There is a possibility of subtle bias existing in the prioritization of smaller works such as tube-well repair (this was mentioned by the former *Panch* representing Kesalwada). It is also possible that the unhappiness of the *Panchas* has not only to do with the actual stationing of works in their respective villages, but also related to the inclusiveness of GP decision making, in terms of the degree of importance or voice that it accords to all its *Panchas*.

In addition to the considerations governing work selection, it is important to examine the procedures that govern the selection of works. The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP informed that the decision about work selection is taken by the GP and passed (ratified) in the *Gram Sabha* meeting (Author's telephonic interview, dated 29/06/2011). The Secretary of Ramgarh GP revealed that the decision was made by the GP, considering the suggestions made by *Gram Sabha*. For instance, the GP chooses one work out of five works for a particular village on the basis of the suggestions made by the *Gram Sabha* of that village (Author's telephonic interview, dated 11/06/2011).

One would expect that consulting the *Gram Sabha* in decision making would greatly reduce the possibility of arbitrary discretion on the GP's part when selecting

works, and result in selection of works according to people's expressed demands. However two factors are likely to constrain such impact of *Gram Sabha* on GP decision making: firstly, as seen in Chapter 5, a coherent expression of popular demand rarely emerges from *Gram Sabha*. The expression of popular demand is all the more imperfect when the attendance is as low and non-inclusive as in the *Gram Sabhas* of Ramgarh GP. Secondly, even if the *Gram Sabha* of a particular village (Madhya Pradesh has single village *Gram Sabhas*) is consulted about the works to be taken up for that particular village, this does not preclude the possibility of bias in work selection. The GP might adhere to those suggestions when it chooses to attend to the demands of that village, but it might choose to give priority to the demands of a different village when selecting works.

The GPs, which make decisions regarding works selection, are heavily dominated by the *Sarpanch* and Secretary in their actual functioning due to low inclusiveness of functioning and low involvement of *Panchas*. The standing committees of the GP for different functional areas are also headed by the *Sarpanch*, as dictated by the law;¹²⁶ this further lowers the inclusiveness of GP functioning.

Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law provides for the establishment of two committees of *Gram Sabha* – the *Gram Vikas Samiti* and the *Gram Nirman Samiti* (see Chapter 5). In actual practice, however, these committees are non-functional in both GPs. The non-functionality of the committees of *Gram Sabha* that could have performed the task of conveying people's demands to the GP (equivalent to GUS in West Bengal GPs) and the pre-eminence of the *Sarpanch* over all aspects of decision making of GP (because of the absence of separate heads of functional committees) very likely has the impact of reducing the inclusiveness of GP decision making.

¹²⁶ Madhya Pradesh GPs have three standing committees: *Nirman tatha Vikas Samiti* (construction and development committee), *Shiksha avam Swashya Samiti* (education and health committee) and *Samanya Prashasan Samiti* (general administration committee)

The role of intermediaries in representing people's preferences inside the 'black box' of decision making and implementation in West Bengal GPs was elaborated in Chapter 7. In West Bengal GPs, opposition groups in the GP and the GUS play the role of supervision and pressurization of GPs on behalf of the people, and thus act as a link between popular demands and GP decision making and implementation. The role of intermediaries in influencing GP decision making and implementation in the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs is elaborated below.

The opposition of a GP is expected to play a role in exercising vigilance on the GP and exerting pressure on it to implement the demanded development works. But this role may be performed only when a noteworthy opposition exists in the first place. In West Bengal GPs the opposition is readily visible because of the explicit party affiliation of GP members, whereas in Madhya Pradesh GPs, the opposition is not easily identifiable. The *Panchayat* law affirms the idea of a group or party based opposition in West Bengal, while Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law recognizes and give importance to the idea of individual opposition.

In Goutampur Colony GP, the current GP has been constituted entirely through uncontested election of elected representatives (*Sarpanch* and *Panchas*). The previous GP (2005-10) too had 90% of its *Panchas* chosen through uncontested election. Such a situation leads one to expect that there will be no such thing as an opposition in the GP. The Secretary of this GP however divulged that the ruler-opposition divide is always seen in the GP, even when the GP is constituted entirely in an uncontested manner.¹²⁷

The *paksh-vipaksh* (ruler-opposition) divide is a permanent situation. *Panchas* want to get works done in their respective villages. But through discussion they come to a consensus to take up works that are most urgent no matter which

¹²⁷The CEO (JP) of Obaidullahgunj JP also revealed that the accusatory stance employed by *Panchas* towards the *Sarpanch* is a common scenario in Madhya Pradesh GPs.

village or ward the work is being done in. All the *Panchas* are active in pressurizing the *Sarpanch* to do work in their respective wards. This situation is quite unlike the past. However, once consensus-based decision is taken about priority of works to take up, the *Panchas* abide by such decision (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 11/06/2011).

Each *Panch* in Goutampur Colony GP pressurizes the *Sarpanch* to take up development works in his/her respective ward; this also brings out that the opposition is not a coherent or organized group here, but is in fact characterized by competition among all the opposition actors (*Panchas*) for resource allocation. Interview responses of *Panchas* in both GPs, already presented, also indicate the existence of opposition, in terms of the us-versus-them and blaming attitude of the individual *Panchas* vis-a-vis the *Sarpanch*, the GP as a whole, and the Secretary. The nature of the opposition in Ramgarh GP is revealed in the following account given by the Secretary of the GP:

Where money is concerned, it is natural to have the *paksh-vipaksh* (ruler-opposition divide). The opposition exercises pressure on the ruler. Conflict between *paksh* and *vipaksh* centers around the allocation of money. But GP decisions are always consensus-based. In case any particular issue cannot be resolved in one GP meeting, it is resolved in the next meeting (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 11/06/2011).

It can be seen from the above accounts that in both GPs, in spite of pressurization from *Panchas*, actual GP decisions are always made through consensus of all GP members. Nevertheless, there is persisting unhappiness among many *Panchas*, as seen in their quoted interview responses. Therefore, it seems that the consensus generated in GP meetings is not always genuine or true.

Given the fragmented nature of opposition in Goutampur Colony GP, it is questionable how much influence the ‘opposition’ actually has on decision making by the GP. In Ramgarh GP the inter-village conflict has created a visible ruler-opposition divide and potentially coherent opposition group in the GP. However, whether this divide is actually engendering an assertive and vigilant opposition depends on the sustained interest and involvement of the *Panchas*. Given the low interest, involvement and assertiveness of most *Panchas* in this GP, it does not appear that such an opposition does indeed exist.

In West Bengal GPs, the task of monitoring implementation is performed, to a great extent, by the GUS. As already seen, the committees of *Gram Sabha* in Madhya Pradesh (*Gram Nirman Samiti* and *Gram Vikas Samiti*) that could have served as the equivalent of GUS remain non-existent or non-functional in the chosen cases.¹²⁸ In Goutampur Colony GP, the task of monitoring of construction projects was bestowed on the *Nirman tatha Vikas Samiti* (Construction and Development Committee) of the GP. The rules of GP administration in Madhya Pradesh too envisage that the task of monitoring is to be performed by this standing committee (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2005). This committee of four *Panchas* headed by the *Sarpanch* does keep watch on on-going infrastructural projects in Goutampur Colony GP to some extent, but the Secretary of the GP confessed that in reality, the major part of monitoring was being done by him (Author’s telephonic interview, dated 11/06/2010). In Ramgarh GP, the Secretary revealed that a handful of *Panchas* (about two or three in number) who were more educated and intelligent compared to the majority of *Panchas*, were delegated the task of monitoring ongoing works (Author’s telephonic interview, dated 11/06/2011).

¹²⁸ Even if these committees had been functional, it is doubtful how effective they would have been in the task of monitoring. This is because the *Sarpanch*, as per the law, has been made the ex-officio head of these committees. The independence of such a body would always be questionable.

In West Bengal GPs, GUSs have already been institutionalized as mechanisms of monitoring, but in the Madhya Pradesh GPs, the institutionalization of intermediate monitoring mechanisms has not been achieved. There is an advantage in localized mechanisms such as GUS carrying out the task of monitoring in particular villages or neighbourhoods (due to the superior knowledge about local conditions), which is greatly reduced when the Secretary of the GP or a handful of *Panchas* take up this task. Furthermore, it is desirable that alongside monitoring by the *Panchas*, *Sarpanch* or the Secretary, some external actor should also be involved in vigilant monitoring to be able to keep watch in a more detached way and check irregularities in which the GP's elected representatives or staff may have complicity. To cater to the diversity within GPs that comes from the co-existence of constituent villages that have unique problems and socio-economic conditions, it is imperative that there should be village-based monitoring committees. Giving control to local representatives and residents over the monitoring process is especially necessary given the feelings of deprivation and dissatisfaction expressed by *Panchas* and residents of certain constituent villages of both the GPs. There is thus a need for an appropriate alternative of the intermediate monitoring mechanism of GUS in the Madhya Pradesh context. The need for GUS in West Bengal GPs may be more acute because of their larger size and population, but the need for localized monitoring mechanisms also remains in the context of Madhya Pradesh GPs. In summary, the only intermediaries involved in the tasks of pressurization (and supervision, to a much lesser degree) of Madhya Pradesh GPs are the individual *Panchas* (who are the so-called 'opposition' actors), and these actors have limited effectiveness in carrying out these tasks.

Having seen the intermediate decision making processes that transpire between the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha* and actual GP outputs, the impact of this

mechanism on the performance of the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs is summarized as follows: With respect to discovering the association between the deliberative dimension of accountability and GP performance, this study uses the degree of popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets as the relevant performance indicator of fulfilment of popular demand (instead of the proportion of *Gram Sabha* proposals fulfilled). This is done for two reasons—firstly, *Gram Sabha* proposals are not highly reflective of actual popular demands, since the GP dominates the preparation of the proposals and the level of *Gram Sabha* attendee inputs in preparation of such proposals is low. Secondly, there is no data available (for the same year) according to which the two GPs can be compared for their proportion of *Gram Sabha* proposals fulfilled. As already seen in Chapter 6, Goutampur Colony GP has higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets compared to Ramgarh GP. The study finding shows that the Madhya Pradesh GP that does better on the deliberation dimension of accountability (Goutampur Colony GP) also has higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets. The same GP also has higher aggregate GP performance. However mere association is not sufficient to indicate a causal relationship between the deliberation dimension of accountability and performance; it is important to have evidence of causal processes existing between them. Evidence from Goutampur Colony GP shows that while its *Gram Sabha* attendance, people's participation and regularity of meetings are higher than those in Ramgarh GP, its actual *Gram Sabha* role in channelling popular input into GP decision making is minimal and not significantly different from that in Ramgarh GP. The *Gram Sabha* of Goutampur Colony GP mainly performs the role of informing people about the decisions of the GP and the rules of government welfare programmes, and not of collecting people's demands for development works. This greatly reduces the possibility of Goutampur Colony GP's *Gram Sabha* having any noteworthy impact on GP performance.

Furthermore, the so-called decisions of the deliberative forum—which are highly imperfect expressions of popular demand—are further constrained and delayed for fulfilment because of having to pass through intermediate decision making strata. Intermediary actors such as the opposition actors have limited effectiveness in pressurizing the GP within decision making structures. The impact of the deliberative mechanism of Madhya Pradesh GPs on their performance is therefore highly tenuous.

There is thus no perceptible link between the relatively more effective functioning of *Gram Sabha* in Goutampur Colony GP and its higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets. The variation in satisfaction levels between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs is therefore much better explained by other variables (such as finances and capacity) than by the deliberation dimension of accountability.

Monitoring Dimension

One may expect that monitoring mechanisms, by exposing wastage or loss of funds, may lead to correction of such loss or wastage and consequent improvement in the GP's fund utilization and performance. Goutampur Colony GP, as already seen in Chapter 5, does better on the monitoring dimension of accountability in the Madhya Pradesh study by virtue of its higher effectiveness of the available monitoring mechanism of Social Audit. The same GP also has higher aggregate GP performance, indicating a positive association between the monitoring dimension and aggregate performance in the Madhya Pradesh study.

Since Social Audit pertains to a scrutiny of NREGA implementation, it is necessary to see which GP did better on NREGA output performance in order to decipher the actual causal impact of Social Audit on performance.¹²⁹ Goutampur

¹²⁹The Social Audit figures for the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs, presented in Chapter 5 and the NREGA output performance (work completion) figures presented in Chapter 6, pertain to 2009-10. As already

Colony GP has relatively higher effectiveness of NREGA Social Audit, but has done worse on NREGA output performance (see Chapter 6). Therefore there is no association seen between Social Audit and NREGA output performance. This precludes the causal impact of Social Audit on GP performance (even though there is an association between the effectiveness of Social Audit and overall GP performance). As seen in Chapter 6, worse NREGA output performance in Goutampur Colony GP is due to unavailability of labour willing to work at existing wage rates, a problem that cannot conceivably be addressed by Social Audit.¹³⁰

Compared to a popular monitoring mechanism such as Social Audit, monitoring of GPs by the bureaucratic personnel at higher tiers of government is much more significant and substantial. GPs in Madhya Pradesh are obliged to frequently report to the Chief Executive Officers of their respective *Janpad Panchayats* on how funds of various programmes such as NREGA have been spent, and future fund allocation is conditional on the receipt of such reports. Such monitoring, very likely, has a greater impact on fund utilization by GPs (and consequently on GP performance) than popular monitoring.

Aspects of Performance and their Relationship with Accountability

GP performance has been assessed in two functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. The impact of accountability on each of these functional areas is assessed below.

stated for the West Bengal study (see Chapter 7), it is conceivable that a part of the impact of Social Audit on NREGA output performance could have been felt in the same financial year because of factors related to the timing and nature of Social Audit. Nevertheless, the full impact of corrective learning induced by Social Audit can possibly only be felt on a more long time basis. NREGA output figures for 2010-11 however, show the same conclusions as 2009-10 figures, regarding the association between effectiveness of Social Audit held in 2009-10 in Madhya Pradesh GPs and NREGA output performance (for 2010-11).¹³⁰ The extraneous factor of labour availability therefore explains the variation in NREGA output performance in the Madhya Pradesh study. In the West Bengal study, variations in NREGA output performance can be explained by the primary determinants of performance such as finances and capacity.

Performance in the Functional Area of Infrastructure

It has been seen in Chapter 6 that Goutampur Colony GP has overall superior performance in the area of infrastructure. This GP also has higher aggregate accountability, indicating an association between overall accountability and performance in this functional area. Goutampur Colony GP did better on the deliberation and monitoring dimensions of accountability (but worse on the other dimension of sanctioning). Therefore the impact of the deliberation and monitoring dimensions on infrastructural performance must be assessed before inferring any causal relationship between accountability and infrastructural performance. The impact of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha* and the monitoring mechanism of Social Audit--which also happen to be accountability mechanisms that are specifically related to the functional area of infrastructure--must be assessed before concluding any causal impact of accountability on performance in the area of infrastructure.

As already seen, the *Gram Sabha*, in actuality, has a minimal impact on the GP's decision making in the functional area of infrastructure, since the GP dominates the selection of works that make up Action Plans of various programmes. Therefore the *Gram Sabha* is not responsible for Goutampur Colony GP's overall higher performance in the area of infrastructure, and its higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets.

The other accountability mechanism relevant to the area of infrastructure--Social Audit--also does not have a causal impact on infrastructural performance. This is evident from the lack of association between effectiveness of Social Audit and NREGA output performance in Goutampur Colony GP. The lack of causal impact of the deliberative and monitoring mechanisms of accountability on the

infrastructural performance of Goutampur Colony GP implies that accountability does not explain the better overall infrastructural performance of Goutampur Colony GP.

Performance in the Functional Area of Alternative Primary Education

The Madhya Pradesh GP that has better performance in the functional area of alternative primary education—Goutampur Colony GP—also has higher aggregate accountability. While there is an association between accountability and GP performance in providing infrastructure to EGS schools, is Goutampur Colony's better performance in this functional area explained by its higher accountability?

As already stated, Goutampur Colony GP has done better than Ramgarh GP on the deliberation and monitoring dimensions of accountability. Since the monitoring mechanism of Social Audit is relevant only to NREGA implementation and not relevant to alternative primary education, only the impact of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha* is relevant.

People attending *Gram Sabha* meetings could have potentially influenced the availability of facilities in EGS schools by using the decision making powers of *Gram Sabha* to demand the provision of such facilities. However, the actual reality in both GPs is that people hardly have any say in formulating the proposals that make up *Gram Sabha* decisions, including proposals for provision of infrastructure to EGS schools. The formulation of the so-called *Gram Sabha* decisions that comprise the list of proposed works, and the selecting of specific works for implementation are in the GP's hands, and dictated by GP preferences. Proposals for providing school infrastructure have to compete with proposals for providing other kinds of infrastructure (such as roads) for selection. The GP decides which kind of infrastructural work is urgent and should be taken up at a particular point of time.

Overall Impact of Accountability on Performance

The findings of the Madhya Pradesh study show that the same GP–Goutampur Colony GP–has both higher aggregate accountability and higher aggregate performance. However, the causal processes that could have brought about the impact of accountability on performance do not operate in actual practice. Table 29 summarizes the relationship between the various dimensions of accountability and performance for the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh.

Table 29: Impact of Accountability Dimensions on Performance in the Madhya Pradesh GPs

Accountability dimension	Association with performance?	Operation of causal processes?	Significant impact on performance?
Sanctioning	No - Ramgarh GP better on sanctioning dimension but Goutampur Colony GP has higher performance	No	No
Deliberation	Yes – Goutampur Colony GP better on deliberation dimension and has higher performance	No ¹³¹	No
Monitoring	Yes – Goutampur Colony GP better on monitoring dimension and also has higher performance	No	No
Aggregate accountability	Yes – Goutampur Colony GP has higher aggregate accountability and higher aggregate performance	No	No

Source: The author's analysis and inference

¹³¹This does not mean that the functioning of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha* does not have any impact on GP functioning. There is a linkage, though highly constrained and very tenuous, between popular inputs expressed in the *Gram Sabha* meetings, and actual GP outputs. What is implied here is that the higher effectiveness of *Gram Sabha* meetings in Goutampur Colony GP (mainly in terms of higher, more inclusive attendance) cannot be held responsible for its higher performance (in terms of people's satisfaction with infrastructural assets).

Table 29 shows that none of the dimensions of accountability has a significant causal impact on performance. Furthermore, GP performance in each selected functional area – whether infrastructure or alternative primary education – cannot be explained by the impact of accountability. In spite of the association between aggregate accountability and aggregate performance observed in the Madhya Pradesh study, a causal relationship between the two variables cannot be inferred. This is because of the evidence that points to the required causal processes not operating in actual practice. Therefore the higher aggregate performance of Goutampur Colony GP is explained not by its higher aggregate accountability, but by other variables. The other determinants of performance are explored in the next section.

Other Determinants of Performance

Three possible primary determinants--accountability, finances and capacity--can explain performance variation between GPs (as discussed in Chapter 1). Since the role of accountability in explaining variation in performance between Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP has been already been examined and ruled out, it is necessary to examine the role of the other two possible primary determinants (finances and capacity) in explaining variation in performance. The secondary determinant of performance, preferences of decision makers, makes a subtle contribution towards GP performance, and its impact will be assessed in the latter part of this section.

Primary Determinants: Finances and Capacity

Apart from accountability, finances and capacity constitute the possible primary determinants of performance. Their impact on performance is assessed in this section.

Finances

A very interesting and counter-intuitive finding for the Madhya Pradesh study is that the GP with lower economic development and lower aggregate performance--Ramgarh GP--has higher overall revenue and expenditure. It can be seen from Table 30 that the total revenue per head of population and total expenditure per head of population are also higher for Ramgarh GP than for Goutampur Colony GP (see the Appendix for population figures).

Table 30: Overall Financial Strength of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09) in Indian Rupees (INR)

<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Total revenue	Revenue per head of population	Total expenditure	Expenditure per head of population
Goutampur Colony GP	1,203,402	829.93	1,299,065	895.91
Ramgarh GP	1,780,066	1112.54	1,684,314	1052.70

Source: Data from Annual Income-expenditure statements of the two GPs.

The overwhelming share of the revenue of a GP comes from the financial allocations made under central and state government programmes implemented by the GP, though a small share may also come from OSR or self-mobilization of resources. Table 31 shows the allocations received from the higher levels by the two GPs in 2008-09 under various state and central programmes.¹³² NREGA, Twelfth Finance Commission Fund and BRGF are central government programmes while *Moolbhoot Yojana*¹³³ and *Adivasi Upayojana* are Madhya Pradesh state government programmes.

¹³²The allocations given in Table 31 do not add up to the total revenue of the two GPs (given in Table 30). The programmes mentioned in Table 31 pertain to the functional area of infrastructure. However GPs also receive allocations under non-infrastructure programmes such as social security programmes.

¹³³*Moolbhoot Yojana* is a fund given as per the Madhya Pradesh State Finance Commission's recommendations. Certain spending priorities for this fund have been pre-defined by the state government. The criteria for allocation to GPs are population, area and extent of tax revenue mobilization (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2008-09).

Table 31: Financial Allocations made under Different Programmes (2008-09) to the Madhya Pradesh GPs (in INR)

Programme	Goutampur Colony GP	Ramgarh GP
NREGA	240,740	1,151,067
Twelfth Finance Commission Fund	212,588	57,119
<i>Moolbhoot Yojana</i>	167,054	61,089
<i>Adivasi Upayojana</i>	250,000	0
BRGF	0	42,180

Source: Annual Income –Expenditure statement of the two GPs.

One GP is not consistently higher than the other in allocations received under all the programmes. Goutampur Colony GP receives higher allocations under some programmes whereas Ramgarh GP receives higher allocations for the others. The main factor responsible for the higher aggregate revenue of Ramgarh GP is the almost five times higher allocation received under NREGA. In fact, Goutampur Colony GP's aggregate non-NREGA revenue and expenditure for 2008-09 are 1.5 times higher than those of Ramgarh GP (see Table 32).

Table 32: NREGA and Non-NREGA Revenue and Expenditure of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09) in INR

Infrastructural Programme	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>			
	Goutampur Colony GP		Ramgarh GP	
	revenue	expenditure	revenue	expenditure
NREGA	240,740	199,249	1,151,067	984,161
Non-NREGA	962,662	1,099,816	628,999	700,153

Source: Data from the Annual Income-Expenditure statements of the two GPs

Table 31 shows that the financial allocations received by Goutampur Colony GP under the Twelfth Finance Commission Fund and the *Moolbhoot Yojana* fund are 3.7 and 2.7 times higher respectively than those received by Ramgarh GP. Ramgarh GP actually receives a very small amount of funds under these programmes in spite of its

higher population and socio-economic backwardness. Furthermore, Goutampur Colony GP, unlike Ramgarh GP, was able to receive the *Adivasi Upayojana* allocation because of its high tribal population. Goutampur Colony GP was able to construct two cement concrete roads using its *Adivasi Upayojana* and Twelfth Finance Commission Fund allocations. The low availability of these funds explains to an extent Ramgarh GP's poorer infrastructural situation in roads and drinking water sources (see Chapter 6). Even though Ramgarh GP receives higher NREGA funding and has superior NREGA output performance, the fact remains that some kinds of crucial (material-intensive) infrastructural work such as repair of tube-wells and construction and repair work on some kinds of roads cannot be done under NREGA because of the rule-based restrictions on the proportion of material costs.¹³⁴ It was seen in Chapter 6 that a majority of works done by Ramgarh GP using NREGA funds were well construction works; this reveals the constraints involved in relying on NREGA funds to develop infrastructure.

GPs in Madhya Pradesh can mobilize Own Source Revenue (OSR) from sources such as taxes, voluntary donations from residents, fines, loans from financial institutions, royalties from sale of minor minerals, and land revenue (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2005, 2008-09). Table 33 shows that the economically more advanced and better performing GP (Goutampur Colony GP), did not mobilize any OSR while the more backward and more poorly performing GP (Ramgarh GP) mobilized 5.6% of its total revenue for 2008-09 through OSR. Ramgarh GP obtained its OSR from land tax revenue and royalties from the sale of minor minerals.¹³⁵ OSR however constitutes a small portion of this GP's total finances, In spite of its higher OSR, Ramgarh GP is not able to achieve better performance than Goutampur Colony GP.

¹³⁴ NREGA rules prescribe a 60:40 labour cost: material cost ratio for construction projects.

¹³⁵ The Madhya Pradesh government has given GPs the power to obtain royalties from the sale of minor minerals found in its jurisdiction such as stones and bricks (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2008-09).

Table 33: Own Source Revenue (OSR) of the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09)

	Total OSR (amount in INR)	OSR as proportion of total revenue	OSR per head of population (INR)
Goutampur Colony GP	0	0%	0
Ramgarh GP	99,985	5.61%	62.49

Source: Data from the Annual Income –Expenditure statements of the two GPs.

An analysis of the finances of the two Madhya Pradesh GPs shows that the composition of finances (that is, the availability of suitable kinds of funds), rather than aggregate financial strength or volume of funds, is an important ingredient behind Goutampur Colony GP's superior overall performance. The higher availability of non-NREGA infrastructural funds--such as Twelfth Finance Commission Fund, *Moolbhoot Yojana* and *Adivasi Upayojana* funds--explains Goutampur Colony GP's ability to take up higher-order, material intensive infrastructural works, and consequently contributes to its better quality and availability of infrastructural assets. This in turn explains the higher popular satisfaction with such assets. Ramgarh GP's allocation from non-NREGA infrastructural funds is very small, which prevents it from taking up certain kinds of crucial infrastructural work (and probably also compromises the quality of the works that it does take up). The poorer availability of suitable funds explains why Ramgarh GP has poorer aggregate performance in spite of its higher aggregate financial strength.

As seen in the West Bengal study, office bearers in Madhya Pradesh GPs also view financial factors as a significant constraint that hinders the GPs attempts to meet people's needs. The former *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP complained that, "the GP suffered from a problem of enough funds to meet all its needs, especially because there was no single robust fund source available furnishing substantial amounts of

money such as INR 10-12 *lakh* (one to 1.2 million), that the GP could use to meet people's needs" (Author's field interview, dated 21/03/2010). A former *Panch* of Ramgarh GP commented that "the amount of money available was not enough, more was needed. Some of the funds supposed to come did not arrive, because of which spending was low" (Author's field interview, dated 3/04/2010). The husband of the current *Sarpanch* of Ramgarh GP lamented that

There is not enough money coming here. If there was money, then I would fix all problems and improve the condition of the villages. There is a total shortage of basic facilities here such as *Anganwadi* building, health centres and tube-wells.

A lot of money comes from World Bank etc, but where does the money go?
(Author's field interview, dated 30/03/2010).

The Secretary of Ramgarh GP, however commented that because of the availability of NREGA funds, some development work such as digging of wells for drinking water and irrigation was made possible, and he felt that this was one programme for which there was no fund shortage (Author's field interview, dated 30/03/2010); the other fund sources, he felt, were highly inadequate (Author's telephonic interview, dated 15/07/2012).

Apart from the amount of funds available, it is the lack of financial autonomy that is seen as a major obstacle by the GP office holders. The current *Sarpanch* and a current *Panch* of Goutampur Colony GP (who is serving his third term as a *Panch*) commented that the GP decision makers felt constrained because of too many conditionalities imposed by the government on existing funds. The current *Sarpanch* (who has been a *Panch* in a previous term) complained:

The GP can only spend according to pre-stated estimates and cannot spend as much as it likes. A problem is created when expenses on a particular work go up due to inflation. An untied fund does exist, but a report on money spent under

this fund has to be given to the government. The valuation done by the engineer is an essential requirement for expenditure to be sanctioned (approved). All programmes are connected to the government. The signature of government officials is required to certify that work is done. Our GP would like to carry out construction work on religious shrines, but it cannot do so on account of programmatic and other government regulations. The engineer refuses to carry out valuation of works on religious shrines. There is no freedom to spend. The government has tied up the hands of the *Sarpanch* (Author's field interview with current *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 17/03/2010).

The experienced current *Panch* of Goutampur Colony commented:

The available funds are not enough to meet people's needs...Programmes should be started in which the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas*, and not government officials, have power to take decisions about the kind of work to be done...sometimes the expenses go above the amounts stipulated by the government. These stipulated amounts should be fixed according to current labour and material prices. Sometimes, buildings cannot be completed because of insufficient funds (Author's field interview with third time *Panch* of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 24/03/2010).

. The Secretary of Ramgarh GP felt that his GP could get more infrastructure development work done if either the NREGA stipulation of 60:40 labour cost to material cost ratio was relaxed (to make possible more material intensive projects) or if more funds were provided by the higher tiers under other programmes such as Twelfth Finance Commission funds (Author's field interview, dated 3/04/2010). The former *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP opined that rules attached to the various funds are fair, but there is a need for a genuine untied fund to be given to GPs that is truly unfettered by rules, and can be spent by the GP according to its discretion to meet urgent

needs (Author's field interview, dated 21/03/2010). Such responses point to the need for the availability of suitable fund sources for GPs that are less constrained by rules.

The interview responses of the GP elected representatives and staff members therefore point to the importance of the amount of funds available and the composition of funds (availability of suitable funds). Given such widely recognized importance of funds, it can be inferred that GPs having higher fund availability and more suitable fund composition would be in a more advantageous position as far as fulfilment of popular demands is concerned.

While the adequate availability of suitable funds is an indispensable ingredient of Goutampur Colony GP's superior performance, it does not completely explain why this GP performed better than Ramgarh GP. The utilization of available funds is a critical determinant of performance in addition to the availability of suitable funds. Table 34 shows the extent of fund utilization in both GPs in 2008-09. The total amount of available funds shown in Table 34 represents a combination of revenue obtained by the GP in 2008-09 and its unspent funds from earlier years.

Table 34: Aggregate Fund Utilization by the Madhya Pradesh GPs (2008-09)

	Total amount of available funds (in INR)	Total Expenditure in INR	Fund utilization proportion
Goutampur Colony GP	1,532,965	1,299,065	84.74%
Ramgarh GP	2,202,976	1,684,314	76.46%

Source: Data from the Income-Expenditure statements of the two GPs

Table 34 shows that Goutampur Colony GP, which has overall better performance, has a slightly higher rate of fund utilization than Ramgarh GP. This finding points to the importance of the ability to utilize available funds as a determinant of performance, alongside the superior availability of suitable funds. The slightly

superior fund utilization of Goutampur Colony GP is the possible consequence of a complex mix of factors, including skills and efforts of GP members and staff, and fund arrival timings. The variation in the extent of fund utilization between the two GPs is not large, thus making it quite difficult to infer the precise reasons behind such variation. GP capacity- comprising elements such as the skills and efforts of elected members and staff—is one possible factor explaining the extent of fund utilization by GPs.

Capacity

GP capacity comprises the components of human resource capacity, leadership, financial management and material capacity. The abilities and efforts of elected representatives (*Sarpanch* and *Panchas*) and staff, and staff availability make up human resource capacity. Leadership is both an element of human resource capacity and a capacity component in its own right.

As far as the efforts of elected GP members are concerned, both Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP suffer from certain common problems. There is low involvement of *Panchas*, and concentration of power and responsibilities in the *Sarpanch* and the staff member (Secretary). Actual powers and responsibility over implementation work pass into the hands of the Secretary because of the *Sarpanch*'s lack of technical knowledge.

In both Goutampur Colony and Ramgarh GP, there is a problem of low involvement of *Panchas* in the implementation work of the GP. This can be attributed, to a large extent, to the institutional structure of Madhya Pradesh GPs, as established by the state's *Panchayat* law. The direct election of the *Sarpanch* and the *Sarpanch*'s ex-officio chairpersonship of all the functional committees of the GP establish a power

asymmetry between the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas*. This factor curtails the involvement of *Panchas* in GP functioning. The current situation in both GPs is such that *Panchas*, even when they do express their voices, are often involved in blaming the *Sarpanch* and Secretary for the problems seen in their respective constituencies or villages, rather than in taking responsibility to solve the problems.

When the *Sarpanch* (because of the lack of technical knowledge) is unable to comprehend the administrative duties of his position, the implementation responsibilities accrue to the staff member, the Secretary. In both the selected GPs, the respective Secretaries admitted that the GP's entire implementation workload is on their shoulders. The Goutampur Colony GP Secretary revealed that the *Sarpanch* did not understand administrative matters such as how to prepare a budget (Author's field interview, dated 17/03/2010). The Ramgarh GP Secretary said that because the *Sarpanch* of the GP was uneducated, the entire burden of the administrative functioning fell on him (Author's telephonic interview, dated 27/01/2011).

While both GPs suffer from the above-stated common problems, there is a degree of variation between the two GPs with respect to the awareness levels of the *Panchas*. The awareness of *Panchas* is poorer in Ramgarh GP compared to Goutampur Colony GP. More *Panchas* in Goutampur Colony GP have heard of and undergone training sessions. Training can help *Panchas* develop skills, awareness and attitudes relevant to their position.

Training can help *Panchas* and the *Sarpanch* understand their basic duties and teach them basic skills relevant to GP decision making and functioning (for example how to place proposals in a GP meeting (Author's field interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 30/03/2010). Training is required in order to inculcate in *Panchas* a

sense of responsibility, maturity and initiative, as expressed by the CEO of Obaidullahgunj Janpad Panchayat:

Usually the *Sarpanch* does everything, but is also blamed for everything by the *Panchas*. *Panchas* are often opposing *Sarpanchas*, for example asking why was so-and-so person removed from the BPL list? Or why did that person get benefits while the other person did not get? They would understand these matters if they had training and knew the rules. *Panchas* are also ultimately responsible. A long time will be needed for them to become mature, but training can help in bringing about maturity in them. Training should be regular, and not just given at the beginning of the tenure (Author's field interview, dated 18/03/2010).¹³⁶

Half the *Panchas* in any GP are now women, and therefore women representatives constitute a potentially significant human resource pool for GPs. Women representatives (whether *Sarpanch* or *Panch*), however, are very rarely assertive or pro-active. As expressed by the CEO of Narsingharh Janpad Panchayat, "There is 50% reservation for women, and a lot of the elected women representatives are mere 'dummies'. There is a need for capacity building of such women" (Author's field interview, dated 31/03/2010). This is seen very clearly in the case of the current *Sarpanch* of Ramgarh GP, who does not even appear in front of the males of her village, and whose husband functions as the de facto *Sarpanch*. Training is critical to build capacity in and empower such female representatives so that they may develop and utilize their inherent potentialities in serving the GP and its people.

Thus, the domination of the *Sarpanch* and the low involvement of *Panchas*, makes it necessary to have regular and proper training for *Panchas*. The CEO of

¹³⁶The researcher also observed the blaming of the *Sarpanch* by *Panchas*. In an interaction between the new *Panchas* and *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP before the first GP meeting, dated 18/03/2010, a GP member accused the *Sarpanch* of being *goonga* (meaning 'mute' in Hindi) in expressing the GP's problems to the higher authorities. This propensity to blame is also evident in many interview responses of *Panchas*, who blame their *Sarpanch* for the backwardness or development problems of their respective constituencies.

Narsingharh *Janpad Panchayat* states, “There is still limited awareness at lower levels. Not all *Panchas* are involved in decision making. Only a handful of people are involved in making decisions. There is a need for the spread of literacy and awareness” (Author’s field interview, dated 31/03/2010). Proper training can make the functioning of the GP more inclusive, make elected representatives more aware, responsible and active, lead to better utilization of the abilities of elected representatives, and reduce the knowledge asymmetry between the Secretary and the elected representatives.

In Ramgarh GP, none of the ex-*Panchas* of the three constituent villages of this GP, whom the author interviewed, had ever attending training,¹³⁷ and all but one of the current and ex-*Panchas* interviewed confessed to never having heard of the existence of training for *Panchas*. In Goutampur Colony GP, all but one of the ex-*Panchas* (representing the villages and hamlets of Goutampur Colony, Goutampur Tola and Kesalwada) interviewed told the author that they had attended training and gained useful knowledge from it.¹³⁸ A third-time *Panch* in Goutampur Colony GP professed that he felt more empowered and better equipped to function as a *Panch* as a result of training (Author’s field interview, dated 24/03/2010). The interview responses of the Goutampur Colony GP *Panchas* about the problems of their villages and the obstacles faced by them were also, in general, more articulate compared to those of the Ramgarh GP *Panchas*.

The *Panchas* of Goutampur Colony GP are also more assertive, and more involved in GP decision making, relative to their counterparts in Ramgarh GP (although their involvement is low in absolute terms). The relatively lower involvement and assertiveness of the *Panchas* of Ramgarh GP can be attributed to two factors—firstly, the irregular holding of GP meetings and secondly, the feudal socio-economic context. It is

¹³⁷ At the time of fieldwork, the current *Panchas* had just been elected; thus one cannot expect them to have undergone training by that time.

¹³⁸ The ex-*Panch* representing Jondra hamlet did not attend training.

obvious that *Panchas* would have a much lower likelihood of influencing GP decisions if GP meetings are held infrequently or irregularly. An ex-*Panch* of Ramgarh GP, revealed that only one or two GP meetings were held in the five years of his tenure (2005-10) (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010). No such problem of infrequent GP meetings was alleged in Goutampur Colony GP.

The socio-economic context in Goutampur Colony GP is far more egalitarian than that of Ramgarh GP, as far as the status of women are concerned. This leads to greater assertiveness of its female *Panchas*. In Goutampur Colony GP, most female *Panchas* attend GP meetings (as seen by the author), are articulate in talking about the problems of their respective villages, and are free from customs of female seclusion. In the highly feudal Ramgarh GP, in contrast, there is social marginalization of women. There is a serious problem of poor involvement and assertiveness of the woman elected representatives (*Panchas* and *Sarpanch*) of Ramgarh GP. The current *Sarpanch* of Ramgarh GP follows the strict social norms of female seclusion, and does not even appear in front of the males of her village. One woman ex- *Panch* of Ramgarh GP said that she never attended any GP meeting, and her husband attended on her behalf. She also did not have any experience of interacting with villagers (even women) about their problems, and expressed a perception that villagers with problems approach the block office, and not the GP member, for help (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010).

The nature of leadership in a GP is inextricably linked to its human resource capacity. GP leaders (*Sarpanchas*) can play a role in promoting or hindering the involvement of *Panchas* in GP functioning. They also have a wider role of planning and co-ordinating the work of the GP and mobilizing all its resources to get its work done. Leadership is thus a pivotal component of GP capacity. Leadership in Goutampur

Colony GP and Ramgarh GP is analyzed here according to the three parameters of inclusiveness, decisiveness and control, and stability/unity.

The low inclusiveness of leadership in both GPs has already been described. The *Sarpanch* in both GPs dominates the functioning of the GP and there is low involvement of *Panchas*. However, there appears to be a relatively greater attempt at inclusive leadership in Goutampur Colony GP, because its GP meetings are held more regularly, giving GP members a relatively greater voice in decision making. An ex-*Panch* of Ramgarh GP stated, “The Secretary and *Sarpanch* do everything. They don’t take the opinion of the other *Panchas*” (Author’s field interview, dated 5/04/2010).

The second dimension of leadership is decisiveness and control. The concentration of power in the hands of the *Sarpanch* in Madhya Pradesh GPs does not result in decisiveness and control in pushing *Panchas* to contribute to GP work. In both the GPs, the extent of delegation of work to *Panchas* is unsatisfactory. *Sarpanchas* are not putting pressure on most *Panchas* to get them involved in the GP’s implementation work or getting them to complete tasks. If *Sarpanchas* were more authoritative as leaders and focused on utilizing the GP’s human resources to get its work done, then *Panchas* would probably be more involved in carrying out tasks delegated to them, and less involved in blaming and accusing the *Sarpanch*.

The third dimension of leadership is stability and unity. The *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP and all its 20 *Panchas* were elected in an unopposed manner in 2010, and this makes it seem that its leadership would be undisputed and unchallenged. In fact, at the beginning of the tenure, the *Sarpanch* and newly elected *Panchas* were very hopeful that the GP was entering an era of stability and unity that would be conducive for development and good performance. In the earlier term (2005-2010) the

Sarpanch was elected in a contested manner, but 90% *Panchas* were elected in an unopposed manner. The *Sarpanch* for that term commented that, “there were problems created by the opposition” (Author’s field interview with former *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). As already seen, *Panchas* of that term (belonging to the more backward villages of the GP-Kesalwada, Jondra and Goutampur Tola) expressed their unhappiness with the *Sarpanch* and Secretary and accused the GP of neglect towards their villages. One *Panch*, who is a member of the GP elected in 2010 and has also been a *Panch* in the two earlier terms, commented on the prospects of the new GP elected in 2010: “There will be less trouble in getting work done. Work will be done more quickly compared to the earlier GP. Those who were in opposition earlier are now part of the ruling group” (Author’s field interview, dated 24/03/2010). However, the actual situation in the present term of Goutampur Colony GP is not as ideal as envisaged in these views. Even in this term of the GP, all the individual *Panchas* are acting as individual opposition forces vis-a`-vis the *Sarpanch*, as already seen.

In Ramgarh GP, the position of *Sarpanch* has been contentious right from the beginning of the term of the present GP (elected in 2010). The *Sarpanch* election in 2010 ended in a tie that had to be resolved through a draw of lots, and there was some disorder and violence in Ramgarh village, where some people were unhappy with the election results. Inter-village divide has influenced the GP’s leadership and the *Panchas*’ attitude towards such leadership, both in the earlier term (2005-2010) and the new term (2010-present). The current *Panchas* belonging to Neenaur village showed hope and optimism about the impact of the leadership for the coming term (since the *Sarpanch* also belongs to Neenaur), while the current *Panchas* belonging to Ramgarh village showed lack of hope (see page 320 for quotations of their interview responses).

As already stated, the involvement of *Panchas* in GP functioning is low in both GPs, and even lower in Ramgarh GP. Therefore there is no apparent likelihood of *Panchas* of the 'opposition' villages turning so assertive as to challenge the leadership of the current *Sarpanch* of Ramgarh GP. The inter-village divide seen in Ramgarh GP is probably having the impact of furthering lowering the involvement of *Panchas* belonging to the 'opposition' villages. Village based divide also exists to a degree in Goutampur Colony GP, but the degree of acrimony is much lesser. While a degree of 'opposition' remains in Goutampur Colony GP, the acceptance of leadership, and consequently the unity of leadership, is greater in Goutampur Colony GP. Goutampur Colony GP therefore has overall better leadership than Ramgarh GP, due to its relative superiority on the dimensions of inclusiveness and unity and stability.

In addition to the capacity of elected members, staff capacity is an important component of a GP's human resource capacity. Staff members are an important resource for GPs because they are equipped with knowledge of rules and regulations as well as skills related to record and account keeping, budgeting and handling finances that are important aspects of the GP's administrative work. Both the selected GPs of Madhya Pradesh suffer from the same staff-capacity related problems, and there is no perceptible variation in staff capacity between them. The unfortunate situation seen in both the GPs is that they have only one staff member each, one Secretary only, to handle the entire administrative workload. The very poor salary given to GP Secretaries, who have such a heavy workload, no doubt undermines their morale and motivation. The only technical assistance for construction works in Madhya Pradesh GPs comes from the block level assistant engineers. The current *Sarpanch* of Goutampur Colony GP complained that the engineers often do not arrive in time to repair non-functional tube-wells (Author's field interview, dated 17/03/2010). Adding to this problem of

technical capacity in both GPs is that the use of contractors for doing construction work is legally prohibited, and the GP has to take on the complete responsibility of procuring labour and materials for such work and also overseeing and co-ordinating it.

Basic financial management, such as budgeting and strategic planning and management of funds are also elements of GP capacity. Certain constraints and limitations are characteristic of the budgeting process in both GPs. The Secretaries of both GPs admitted that budgets are mere estimates, and do not totally conform to the actual income and expenditure of the GP for the coming year. The comments of the Secretaries of the two GPs make this clear:

Budgets are estimates, based on the possibilities of income and expenditure for the coming year, approved in *Gram Sabha* meetings and sent to higher levels for approval. Some actual expenses are not mentioned in the budget, because they could not be foreseen when the budget was prepared. In every year's budget, 10% addition is made to the income-expenditure of the previous year (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 15/07/2012).

In its budget, Goutampur Colony GP actually asks for more funds than it expects to spend in the coming year. This is because one cannot be sure of how much money the higher tiers will actually send. In fact, if we keep a low ceiling in the budget itself, then we might be constrained by the low targeted amount, and the actual money sent might be even lower than what is asked for (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 15/07/2012).

An important constraint that relates to budgeting in both the Madhya Pradesh GPs is that the GP is overwhelmingly dependent on funds arriving from higher tiers.

GPs therefore lack control on the amount of funds actually arriving. The Secretary of Ramgarh GP elaborated,

The budget of a GP would be good if its tax revenue was good. If tax revenue is not good, then the budget would also not be good. In the absence of tax revenue, the budget can only rest on an estimate of funds supposed to arrive from higher levels. This GP has very little tax revenue and most of its funds come from above (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 15/07/12).

Yet another constraint on budgeting in both GPs is that the Secretary dominates the process. The input of the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas* is very low because of the lack of technical knowledge on the part of such elected representatives. It is unfortunate that elected representatives are not able to play a significant part in voicing their opinions in budget preparation. Budgets, no matter how rough, represent a prior plan of how the GP proposes to spend its funds. The responses of the Secretaries of both GPs reveal their dominance in budget preparation:

There is consultation with the *Sarpanch*, but *Sarpanch* does not always have the knowledge required to make the budget (Author's field interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 17/03/2010).

The Secretary prepares the budget, taking opinions from the *Sarpanch*. The *Sarpanch*, however, is inexperienced and does not know much (Author's field interview with Secretary of Ramgarh GP, dated 30/03/2010).

Certain basic elements of strategic planning of spending are seen in both GPs. In both GPs, seasonal principles govern the taking up of works. The Secretaries of both GPs revealed that afforestation works were taken up by the GP in the monsoon season (Author's telephonic interviews, dated 15/07/2012). The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP revealed that road works were not taken up in the rainy season. The GPs

take up works from the *Gram Sabha*-approved action plan according to the urgency of need and intensity of popular demand (keeping in mind, but not strictly adhering to, the order of priorities stated in the *Gram Sabha* approved action plan, according to the Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP). Apart from such rudimentary planning, there does not seem to be much strategic planning in place, and there appears to be limited scope for strategic planning:

Programmatic funds from higher tiers do not arrive in lump sum amounts.

Whenever the GP intends to take up a particular work (say construction of a bus stop in a particular village), it has to send the demand for funds for that work up to the higher tiers. The funds that arrive can be spent only on that specific work. Furthermore, the funds arrive on instalment basis. When part of the work is done, an evaluation has to be done by the block-level engineer and pictures of the completed portion sent to the higher tiers when demanding the next portion of funds for the concerned work. It is only on completion of these requirements that the next fund instalment is sent by the higher tiers (Author's telephonic interview with Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 15/07/2012).

Madhya Pradesh GPs thus do not have much autonomy in strategic planning, since they do not have the option of strategically dividing an available lump sum amount among different priorities. Therefore, the budgeting and strategic planning seen in the two Madhya Pradesh GPs is rudimentary and highly constrained. This gives an idea about the nature of financial management in the two GPs.

As far as the material capacity (equipment and facilities) of the GP offices and their use are concerned, two important weaknesses were seen in both the selected GPs. Firstly, there is no computerization of GPs, which adds to the burden of the sole staff member in maintaining copious records and accounts manually. The second weakness is the infrequent or rare use of the GP *Bhavan* or office building. In Goutampur Colony

GP, the Secretary's residence is the venue of the office work and the GP office is opened only to hold the GP meetings. Official GP work being done in the Secretary's residence in effect aggravates the personalization of GP work in one individual (the Secretary) and is possibly a factor contributing to the low involvement of the *Panchas*.

In Ramgarh GP, the Secretary does his official work at the *Janpad Panchayat* office at the block Head Quarter in Narsingharh (as observed by the author and admitted by the Secretary). The situation in Ramgarh GP, with respect to the utilization of material facilities, is even worse than that of Goutampur Colony GP. In Goutampur Colony GP, at least the GP *Bhavan* is used for the monthly GP meetings. In Ramgarh GP, however, even GP meetings happen infrequently, as revealed by a former *Panch* of this GP (Author's field interview, dated 5/04/2010),¹³⁹ the GP building is used to conduct the activities of the *Anganwadi Kendra* (Author's field interview with husband of current *Sarpanch* of Ramgarh GP, dated 30/03/2010), and the conduct of GP work at the block Head Quarters further distances its functioning from its *Panchas*.

Summing up, it can be inferred that while both GPs suffer from problems of poor capacity, Goutampur Colony GP has relatively higher aggregate capacity than Ramgarh GP. This is because of the higher awareness of its *Panchas*, greater assertiveness and involvement of *Panchas* in GP decision making, and relatively greater inclusiveness and unity of leadership. Its utilization of the GP office building, while very poor, is better than that of Ramgarh GP. There is no perceptible inter-GP difference as far as the remaining capacity component of financial management is concerned.

¹³⁹This *Panch* rued that the GP existed 'only for name's sake'.

Secondary Determinant

The secondary performance determinant--preferences of decision makers--also affects performance, although its impact on GP performance is less obvious and fundamental than that of the primary determinants. It plays a subtle role in explaining performance variation between GPs.

Preferences of Decision Makers

The preferences of decision makers at the GP level influence the behaviour of decision makers at this level and have a subtle impact on GP performance. The preferences of GP decision makers determine the level of inclusiveness in GP decision making. Greater the inclusiveness of decision making, the lesser would be its arbitrariness. Such inclusiveness (or lack of it) affects the GP's selection of works for implementation, and thus has a bearing on the satisfaction levels of the villagers. Both the selected GPs --Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP--have the common feature of low levels of inclusiveness in decision making.

In spite of the common shortcomings in inclusiveness in both GPs, it appears that the decision making process in Goutampur Colony GP is relatively more inclusive than in Ramgarh GP. The higher assertiveness and involvement of *Panchas* and the more regular convening of GP general body meetings by the *Sarpanch* and the Secretary are responsible for the relatively higher inclusiveness of decision making in Goutampur Colony GP.

It was seen in the West Bengal study that the preferences of the decision makers at the levels of the block-level and district-level *Panchayats* have a subtle impact on GP performance, since decision makers at these tiers can extend assistance to GPs and augment their resources. In Madhya Pradesh, the *Janpad Panchayat* enjoys discretion

only in the allocation of funds known as the *Sansad Nidhi* (Member of Parliament Local Area Development Fund) and *Vidhayak Nidhi* (Local Area Development Fund of Members of Legislative Assembly). The *Sarpanchas*, Secretaries and *Panchas* of Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP complained that they hardly ever receive allocations from these funds, owing to the political preferences of the decision makers at these levels.¹⁴⁰ The official records of both GPs also show that no money was received by both GPs from these funds in the year 2008-09, and no work or project was carried out using these funds. Therefore, there is no variation between the two GPs with respect to assistance or support received from the higher level *Panchayats*.

In addition to the preferences of decision makers, upward accountability of GPs might also be subtly contributing to performance variations between the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh. Upward accountability refers to the pressure or control exercised on GPs by their higher tiers, especially their respective block and district level authorities.

The Chief Executive Officer of the *Janpad Panchayat* (CEO (JP)) is a source of substantial control on any Madhya Pradesh GP. The Secretary of the GP is required to frequently submit reports on spending of funds to the CEO (JP) and be answerable to the CEO (JP) for the protection of rules in GP decisions. There is, however, no conclusive evidence that Goutampur Colony GP experiences more pro-active control from its CEO (JP) compared to Ramgarh GP. The Secretaries of both GPs spoke of vigilant control and frequent demanding of reports by their respective *Janpad*

¹⁴⁰The Secretary of Ramgarh GP complained that political leaders refuse to give funds to GPs like his one, stating the grounds that they did not receive enough votes from the area (Author's field interview, dated 3/04/2010). A *Panch* of Goutampur Colony GP revealed that "*Sarpanchas* with political reach get these benefits from the *Janpad Panchayat* while others don't" (Author's field interview, dated 24/03/2010). A former representative of Goutampur Colony GP in Obaidullahgunj *Janpad Panchayat* revealed that currently *Sansad Nidhi* and *Vidhayak Nidhi* funds were only reaching those GPs whose *Sarpanchas* were actually affiliated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Author's field interview, dated 18/03/2010). While political party role in GP elections or functioning is not recognized by Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law, *Sarpanchas* and *Panchas* are in actual practice, often affiliated to a particular political party.

Panchayat CEOs.¹⁴¹ This study is unable to detect actual variation in the extent of upward accountability between the two GPs. Therefore no inference is made in the Madhya Pradesh study about such variation and the extent of its impact on fund utilization and GP performance.

Conclusion

Table 35 shows the association between each of the possible primary performance determinants (accountability, finances and capacity) and performance, revealed through the comparison between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs.

Table 35: Association between Performance Determinants and Performance in the Madhya Pradesh Study

<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Performance	Determinants of performance		
		Accountability	Finances	Capacity
Goutampur Colony GP	Higher	Higher	Lower financial strength but more favourable fund composition	Higher
Ramgarh GP	Lower	Lower	Higher financial strength but less favourable fund composition	Lower

Source: Analysis and inference carried out by the author

Table 35 shows that the GP with higher accountability--Goutampur Colony GP--also has higher performance compared to the other chosen GP, Ramgarh GP. An association between accountability and performance by itself, however, does not indicate causality. The findings of the Madhya Pradesh study show that there is no

¹⁴¹The Secretary of Goutampur Colony GP revealed that the CEO(JP) sometimes demanded reports at very short notice: for instance the CEO would send a mobile phone text message to the Secretary, and the next morning the Secretary would have to go to the *Janpad Panchayat* office to submit the demanded report.

evidence of the operation of the causal processes that are required to bring about the impact of accountability on GP performance. Therefore, accountability cannot be inferred as having a causal impact on GP performance in the Madhya Pradesh study.

Since accountability is not salient in explaining performance variation between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs, finances (funding composition, not aggregate financial strength) and capacity are the primary performance determinants that explain the superior performance of Goutampur Colony GP. The preferences of the decision makers, that result in relatively greater inclusiveness in GP decision making, also contribute (albeit subtly) to the superior performance of Goutampur Colony GP.

While Goutampur Colony GP has lower aggregate financial strength than Ramgarh GP, it has a more favourable fund composition (that is, a higher amount of non-NREGA infrastructural funds) that gives it an advantage in taking up higher order infrastructural works, and achieving better quality of construction work, which in turn leads to higher public satisfaction with infrastructural assets. Goutampur Colony GP was also able to utilize its financial resources in a better way to achieve better performance because of relatively superior capacity. In the Madhya Pradesh study, however, the differences in capacity and fund utilization between the two GPs are not large. Therefore, the combination of fund composition and capacity, rather than capacity by itself, is salient in explaining variation in performance between the two GPs.

Why is accountability not having a significant impact on GP performance in the Madhya Pradesh study? This is happening because the actual operation of available accountability mechanisms, while creating a degree of popular control, are failing to fulfil the conditions through which such impact could have been brought about. The failure of accountability to make a significant difference to performance is due to the

combined failure of all three types of accountability mechanisms—sanctioning (elections), deliberative (*Gram Sabha*) and monitoring (Social Audit) – to have a notable impact on performance, but most notably due to the failures of the sanctioning mechanism.

Goutampur Colony GP, which has higher aggregate accountability, does better on the deliberation and monitoring dimensions of accountability. However the deliberative and monitoring mechanisms have a minimal impact on GP performance as already seen in this chapter. Goutampur Colony GP's accountability failed to have a decisive impact on its performance not only due to the failure of its deliberative and monitoring mechanisms but also due to its shortcomings on the sanctioning dimension of accountability. This GP was worse than Ramgarh GP on the sanctioning dimension of accountability. It had very low levels of electoral contestation in the 2005 elections, and non-existent electoral competition in the 2010 elections. Such shortcoming on the sanctioning dimension is the most important reason for the failure of Goutampur Colony GP's accountability to have a decisive impact on performance.

In Ramgarh GP, the degree of sanctioning is at a relatively higher level, but such sanctioning is not having an impact on performance. The selection of elected representatives in Ramgarh GP is not based on criteria such as competence or talent; it is no wonder that the evaluation and rejection of candidates in the GP elections of Ramgarh GP does not have any impact on its performance. None of the incumbent elected representatives of Ramgarh GP even stood for re-election: this rules out the possibility of performance-based sanctioning of incumbent GP members. Sanctioning based on performance considerations is necessary for accountability to have a decisive impact on performance. GP members should feel the concrete threat of being thrown out of office if they fail to seriously contribute to GP functioning. Such concrete threat,

in turn, would push the incumbent GP members to step up their contribution towards the GP.

The significance of performance-based sanctioning of GP members was brought out in the West Bengal study (Chapter 7). Such significance can also be illustrated for the Madhya Pradesh study by drawing on the example of the accountability-performance relationship with respect to alternative primary school teachers (EGS school teachers). Insights on the impact of accountability on the performance of EGS teachers can be applied to any service-providing functionary, including GP members such as the *Sarpanch* and *Panchas*.

In Madhya Pradesh, both EGS and mainstream primary school teachers are made answerable to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the *Gram Sabha* and the GP. Both school types are exposed to the same accountability mechanisms, yet it is seen that accountability is having more of an impact on the performance of EGS teachers in Goutampur Colony GP than on the performance of the mainstream primary school teacher of this GP. Evidence of the better performance of EGS teachers in Goutampur Colony GP (in terms of lower absenteeism), compared to the performance of mainstream primary school teachers, brings out the the significance of performance-based sanctioning in this respect.

In spite of the much lower salary of EGS teachers, they are found to be more sincere than mainstream primary school teachers (Author's field interview with male, SC villager survey respondent of Goutampur Colony GP, dated 21/03/2010). The former *Sarpanch* of this GP expressed that the EGS teachers never give any opportunity for complaint (Author's field interview with former *Sarpanch*, dated 21/03/2010). On the other hand, there is a problem of the rampant absenteeism, negligence and problematic attitude of some mainstream primary school teachers (Author's field

conversation with newly elected *Panchas*, dated 18/03/2010; Author's field interviews with current *Sarpanch*, dated 17/03/2010, and with former *Sarpanch*, dated 21/03/2010). No action was taken by the government against one particularly errant mainstream primary school teacher of Goutampur Colony GP who is a notorious absentee, in spite of numerous and repeated complaints against him made by the PTA and the GP (Author's field conversation with newly elected *Panchas*, dated 18/03/2010). The main reason for the impunity of such errant mainstream primary school teachers is their permanent appointment. A newly elected *Pancha* of this GP told the author that "the permanent teachers are the notorious ones" (Author's field conversation with newly elected *Panchas*, dated 18/03/2010) while the former *Sarpanch* of this GP said that "temporary teachers are not so bad" (Author's field interview, dated 21/03/2010). The contractual or temporary appointment of EGS teachers opens opportunities for the PTA and GP to bring about the sanctioning of errant teachers on performance grounds. EGS teachers have more insecure tenures because of their contractual appointment, and complaints made by the PTA or the GP may result in the termination of their services by the *Janpad Panchayat*. The contractual tenure of EGS teachers forces them to take their duties more seriously than mainstream primary school teachers.

The significance of accountability as a determinant of EGS teacher performance is therefore linked to the opportunities to sanction them because of their contractual tenure, and the real threat of performance-based sanctioning felt by the EGS teachers. Similarly, GP accountability could be effective in improving GP performance if (a) opportunities for sanctioning of incumbent GP members were available and (b) the such sanctioning could be linked to performance considerations. The contesting of re-election by incumbent representatives and the impending likelihood of the removal

of such representatives based on performance considerations, could have improved the efforts put in by them, thus bringing about a certain degree of improvement in GP performance. If such pressure could be effectively applied to GP members, their involvement in GP functioning would increase as a result, and the capacity of the GP would go up, resulting in an improvement of aggregate GP performance. However, the actual achievement of performance-based sanctioning and its impact on performance is very difficult to achieve, since two important conditions have to be met: firstly, villagers must be able to notice and evaluate GP members' performance contribution. Secondly, GP members willing to seek re-election must be sufficiently motivated or interested to win the re-election; only then will they feel the pressure of impending performance-based sanctioning, and put in their best efforts into improving GP functioning.

The impact of accountability, through the operation of the causal process of performance-based sanctioning, is likely to push up the performance of a GP only to a certain level. As already seen, the better performing GP, Goutampur Colony GP, has superior financial composition and capacity. Even if Ramgarh GP were to achieve the occurrence of performance-based sanctioning, it does not seem likely that it would be able to match up to Goutampur Colony GP's performance without an improved availability of the appropriate kinds of funds and improvement of overall capacity. Its capacity problem of lower involvement of elected members could however be addressed to a certain extent (but not completely) by the impact of performance-based sanctioning.¹⁴² Without a reasonable availability of capacity and suitable fund sources, Ramgarh GP will not be able to improve its performance beyond a limited extent.

¹⁴² One source of the low involvement of GP members in Ramgarh GP is the feudal social context that results in the passivity of female GP members. It is unlikely that the impact of this factor can be overcome through the impact of accountability pressures.

The Madhya Pradesh study has shown that the functioning of the existing accountability mechanisms is characterized by certain shortcomings. While the degree of accountability or popular control is seen to be relatively higher in Goutampur Colony GP, the degree of popular control in both GPs, in absolute terms, is low. The level of electoral competitiveness in both GPs is low in absolute terms. Furthermore, *Gram Sabha* attendees are not playing any significant role in decision making. Nor is *Gram Sabha* able to serve as a forum of collective decision making and action, or rational debate, for the village people. A village elder in Ramgarh GP (belonging to Neenaur village) commented on the low degree of popular pressure in his GP:

The *Panchas* and *Sarpanch* so far have not done anything for this village.

However, more consciousness and awareness among villagers is needed... It is up to the people of this village to be more aware and conscious... The degree of popular pressure is very low because the people are too busy with their own work. They are pre-occupied with their worries and earning their livelihood.

There is a problem of unemployment here (Author's field interview, dated 3/04/2010).

Whatever popular control is generated through accountability mechanisms has a highly constrained impact on GP performance because of the inability to meet certain conditions, as already seen. In other words, the ability of people to pressurize the GP to meet their demands is very limited. The result is that there is a gap between popular demands and what is actually delivered by the GP. Qualitative insights, derived from villager interviews in both GPs, highlight this gap.

The West Bengal study had found that people often evaluate overall GP performance in terms of whether the GP has fulfilled their demands for welfare benefits such as pensions. In the Madhya Pradesh GPs, too, there is an association between personal beneficiary status and overall satisfaction with GP performance. People in the

Madhya Pradesh GPs also hold GPs responsible, to an extent, for performance in providing welfare benefits, an area in which the GP has limited autonomy. In fact, as also seen in the West Bengal study, demands presented by the villagers to the Madhya Pradesh GPs largely pertain to welfare benefits, such as IAY money, old age pension, widow pension, and ration cards. However the reasons stated by the respondents in the Madhya Pradesh GPs behind their satisfaction with overall GP performance, show that their assessment of GP performance is not completely based on whether or not they have received personal benefits such as pensions from the GP. The infrastructural problems in the Madhya Pradesh GPs – such as the condition of tube-wells and other water supply sources, roads and drainage--have also given importance, in addition to beneficiary issues, by the respondents in their stated reasons behind their aggregate assessment of performance, as seen in Chapter 6. Therefore, it appears that people in Madhya Pradesh GPs also give importance to basic infrastructure provision, an area over which the GP has the power of autonomous decision making, in evaluating the GP.

As many as 75% villager survey respondents in Ramgarh GP were totally dissatisfied with GP performance, compared to 18.75% in Goutampur Colony GP. There is therefore a large difference between the two Madhya Pradesh GPs, as far as people's assessment of overall GP performance is concerned. In both GPs, there is a gap between the level of popular demands and their actual fulfilment, allegations of bias against particular villages, and shortcomings in service delivery. Nevertheless, there might be some specific reasons that contribute to the much poorer perceived responsiveness of Ramgarh GP, apart from the lack of appropriate funds and capacity. As already mentioned, some villagers and *Panchas* of Ramgarh GP mention elements of systematic bias, such as neglect of particular villages by *Sarpanchas* who belong to a different village or do not win a significant number of votes from a particular village.

Other aggravating factors are revealed in survey responses of some residents of Ramgarh GP:

I am not hopeful about the needs of my village being fulfilled because of the inter-village dispute over the *Sarpanch* election (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent residing in Ramgarh village, dated 5/04/2010).

I am not hopeful about the needs of the village being fulfilled because there is too much '*kheecha-tani*' (dispute) in this GP (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent residing in Ramgarh village, dated 5/04/2010).

I am not at all satisfied with the GP. There is too much '*chakkarbazi*' (loosely translated as self-interested behavior) in this GP, and no work done (Author's field interview with male, general category villager survey respondent residing in Ramgarh village, dated 5/04/2010).

The level of popular pressure and impact of popular pressure is therefore low in both GPs. However the level of such pressure and its impact seems to be even lower in Ramgarh GP. Villagers of this GP identify aggravating factors such as intra-GP disputes and self-interested behaviour of functionaries as factors that are responsible for the poor receptiveness of their GP to popular demands. While the inter-village divide is seen even in Goutampur Colony, it appears that inter-village divide-- a manifestation of lack of unity among villagers and inside the GP--is a more serious factor affecting popular control and its impact in Ramgarh GP.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes this study by presenting a summary and comparison of the findings of the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies, and the common inferences arising from the two state studies. It also highlights the contribution of this study to the literature and its policy relevance. It finally proposes some areas of future research that can enhance the understanding of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government.

Comparing the Findings of the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh Studies

This study has been carried out in the two Indian states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Two local government units (GPs) have been compared with each other in each state—Debipur GP and Nowdapanur GP in West Bengal, and Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP in Madhya Pradesh. This section presents a summary of the findings from the two state studies, and also notes the similarities and differences between the findings of the two state studies. Corresponding to the structure of this thesis, the findings on accountability, performance, and the accountability-performance relationship are presented in sequence in this section. The common conclusions of the two state studies form a basis for the overall study's inferences with respect to the accountability-performance relationship and the identification of the salient determinants of local government performance.

Accountability

Accountability has been operationalized in this study in terms of three dimensions of sanctioning, deliberation and monitoring. These dimensions have been assessed on the basis of the effectiveness of the corresponding accountability mechanisms of elections, Village Assembly and Social Audit respectively.

In the West Bengal study, Nowdapanur GP was inferred as having higher aggregate accountability than Debipur GP primarily due to its better position on two out of three dimensions of accountability—the crucial sanctioning dimension and the deliberation dimension. Nowdapanur GP did better on the sanctioning dimension because of its more competitive GP elections, and on the deliberation dimension due to its relatively higher effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad*. Its higher effectiveness of *Gram Sansad* can be attributed mainly to its higher and more inclusive *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance. On the monitoring dimension of accountability, however, Debipur GP did better owing to its comparatively higher effectiveness of Social Audit, which was evident in its more serious conduct of Social Audit and higher perceived effectiveness.

In the Madhya Pradesh study, Goutampur Colony GP was found to have higher aggregate accountability because it did better on two dimensions of accountability, viz. deliberation and monitoring. Its better position on the deliberation dimension was because of its better functioning of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha*. It had higher and more inclusive *Gram Sabha* attendance, compared to the dismal situation with respect to the same in the other chosen GP, Ramgarh GP. Goutampur Colony GP's better situation on the monitoring dimension is because of its better functioning of the monitoring mechanism of Social Audit. There is available evidence that the elements of the Social Audit process, such as conduct of the public meeting to involve villagers in

the Social Audit process and examination of GP records, were carried out in Goutampur Colony GP. There is no such available credible evidence for Ramgarh GP.

In the West Bengal study, the GP that did better on the sanctioning dimension (Nowdapanur GP) had higher aggregate accountability. Contrary to this, the GP with higher aggregate accountability in the Madhya Pradesh study (Goutampur Colony GP) was relatively worse than the other GP on the sanctioning dimension due to its lower electoral competition. In Goutampur Colony GP, as many as 90% *Panchas* were elected in an unopposed manner in 2005, and in the 2010 elections all its *Panchas* and its *Sarpanch* were chosen in an unopposed manner. However, the dismal record of Ramgarh GP (the one with the more competitive GP elections) with respect to the functioning of the deliberative and monitoring mechanisms, together with its weakness seen in the shortcoming of elections as a sanctioning mechanism (low levels of competitiveness of *Panch* elections in absolute terms) lead to Ramgarh GP being assessed as having lower aggregate accountability.

While the accountability mechanisms available in the local government systems of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh - elections, Village Assembly and Social Audit - are the same, their institutional or legal features are different. These differences in institutional features have implications for their actual functioning. As already seen in this thesis (Chapters 4 and 5), West Bengal has party-based GP elections while Madhya Pradesh does not. This affects the overall extent of competitiveness of elections in these two states. In West Bengal, uncontested election of GP members is rare (Author's field interview with Assistant Secretary of West Bengal State Election Commission, dated 21/12/2009),¹⁴³ but in Madhya Pradesh GPs, uncontested election of GP members is a

¹⁴³ Data also shows that only 10.94% of GP seats were filled in an uncontested manner in the 2003 *Panchayat* elections in West Bengal (Government of West Bengal 2007).

common scenario.¹⁴⁴ Party involvement in GP elections leads to higher interest in contesting such elections, and results in increased competitiveness of GP elections. As already seen, a high proportion of *Panch* seats were filled in an uncontested manner in Goutampur Colony GP and Ramgarh GP, both the chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh (with an even higher proportion of uncontested seats in the former). In the electorally more competitive Madhya Pradesh GP (Ramgarh GP), 61.5% *Panchas* were chosen in an unopposed manner in 2010, whereas 15% GP members were chosen in the same manner in the electorally less competitive West Bengal GP in 2008 (Debipur GP).

The role of political parties in GP elections in West Bengal implies that the political party based ruling groups of West Bengal GPs (in addition to individual incumbent representatives) face a degree of pressure from competitive elections. Unlike in Madhya Pradesh GPs (which lack any coherent ruling group due to the absence of party role in GP elections) the ruling groups of West Bengal GPs face the threat of being replaced by other political parties in the next elections. Such pressure on the ruling group, which makes relevant a notion of collective responsibility of the ruling group, is a source of popular pressure seen in West Bengal GPs but not in Madhya Pradesh GPs.

The influence of political parties in West Bengal GPs not only extends to GP elections and decision making within the GP, but also affects the functioning of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad*. Debipur GP has less inclusive *Gram Sansad* meeting attendance than Nowdapanur GP because the overwhelming dominance of the ruling party in the former repels non-partisan and opposition party-affiliated villagers from attending the meetings. The less inclusive *Gram Sabha* meeting attendance in Ramgarh GP of Madhya Pradesh, compared to Goutampur Colony GP in the same state, is mainly due to the feudal socio-economic context in the former which disempowers

¹⁴⁴In the 2005 *Panchayat* elections in Madhya Pradesh, 57.2% *Panch* seats were filled in an uncontested manner (Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission 2006).

women and people belonging to the lower caste groups. The variation in the inclusiveness of attendance between the two chosen GPs is explained by the political factor in the West Bengal study, but by socio-economic factors in the Madhya Pradesh study.

Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law lays down a system of *Gram Swaraj* (sovereignty of the deliberative body of *Gram Sabha* in village governance). West Bengal's *Panchayat* law does not state such sovereignty of its deliberative body of *Gram Sansad*. However, the reality in the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs shows a glaring gap between law and practice, as far as the actual decision making role of the deliberative forum (*Gram Sabha*) is concerned.

It has been seen in Chapters 4 and 5 that the respective *Panchayat* laws of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh bestow decision making powers of proposing infrastructural works on their respective deliberative bodies. In the chosen GPs of both West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, however, the lists of proposed works are actually not formulated by the deliberative bodies. Nevertheless, decision making in the West Bengal GPs is more inclusive because the village-constituency level intermediary bodies known as GUSs prepare this list for their respective constituencies. Furthermore, there is evidence that *Gram Sansad* attendees also recommend some proposals that are added to the list. In Madhya Pradesh GPs, however, the GP dominates decision making by preparing the proposal lists. There is no intermediary organization, in actual practice, corresponding to the GUS. Furthermore, there is no evidence of the *Gram Sabha* attendees playing a role in suggesting additional proposals in both the chosen GPs. The *Gram Sabhas* of the chosen Madhya Pradesh GPs are actually playing the mere role of informing people about the decisions of the GP and the rules of government programmes.

The rules related to Social Audit are similar in both West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, in the sense that they envisage the combined involvement of an elite Social Audit Team/VMC and a popular assembly of villagers. The involvement of the popular assembly (*Gram Sabha*) is an accepted requirement in the GPs of Madhya Pradesh, since the agenda of *Gram Sabha* meetings of both GPs shows Social Audit as a regular item. This is not the case in West Bengal GPs, where neither of the chosen GPs has involved its *Gram Sansad* in Social Audit, and Social Audit was never seen to be an item on the *Gram Sansad* meetings of both GPs. The Social Audit procedure followed in the West Bengal GPs is therefore less participatory and more top-down than in the Madhya Pradesh GPs.

Performance

Performance in the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh GPs was assessed for the same functional areas of infrastructure and alternative primary education. In both states, these are functional areas where GPs enjoy a degree of autonomous decision making.

In both the state studies, the economically more developed GP showed better overall performance. In West Bengal, Debipur GP was found to be the better performing GP, on the basis of its superior performance in both the chosen functional areas. With respect to infrastructure, Debipur GP performed far better on objective output-based measures and popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets. Goutampur Colony GP was found to be the better performing GP in the Madhya Pradesh study, on the basis of its overall superior functioning in both the chosen functional areas. With respect to infrastructure, Goutampur Colony GP overall performed better on satisfaction with infrastructural assets, while Ramgarh GP did better on the objective output-based measures (based on NREGA output figures). Goutampur Colony GP was

however adjudged as having higher overall performance in the area of infrastructure owing to its better performance on the crucial satisfaction indicators. Compared to the relatively more mixed performance assessment in the Madhya Pradesh study (where Ramgarh GP did better on the objective output-based indicators for infrastructural programmes but Goutampur Colony GP did better on the other performance indicators), the better performing GP in the West Bengal study–Debipur GP–had consistently higher performance on all the performance indicators.

Accountability-Performance Relationship

Debipur GP had higher aggregate performance in the West Bengal study, but had lower aggregate accountability than the other selected GP, Nowdapanur GP. Since different GPs had higher performance and higher accountability, there is no association between accountability and performance seen in the West Bengal study. The actual operation of accountability mechanisms, in the West Bengal cases, was unable to fulfil important mediating conditions required for having an impact on performance. The West Bengal study therefore shows no evidence of accountability having a significant impact on GP performance. The impact of accountability on GP performance in the West Bengal GPs is highly constrained because of the non-fulfillment of important mediating conditions.

Unlike in the West Bengal study, the Madhya Pradesh GP that had better performance (Goutampur Colony GP) also had higher aggregate accountability. However the important mediating conditions required for accountability mechanisms to have an impact on GP performance were not fulfilled. The impact of accountability on performance of Madhya Pradesh GPs is also highly constrained, and there is no evidence of accountability having a significant impact on GP performance even in the Madhya Pradesh study.

As seen in both the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies, the inability of accountability to have a significant impact on GP performance can be attributed to the cumulative shortcomings of all three types of accountability mechanisms—deliberative, monitoring and sanctioning—to have an impact on performance. These accountability mechanisms are creating a degree of popular control, but the impact of such popular control on GP performance is highly constrained.

The list of proposed works approved by the respective deliberative forum defines the work agenda of GPs in both West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. In the West Bengal GPs, however, the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sansad* is playing a much greater role in channelling popular input into decision making compared to the Madhya Pradesh GPs where the GP actually formulates the list of proposed works (which is then subjected to a superficial endorsement by the *Gram Sabha*). However a common reality in both West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh GPs is that the works approved by the deliberative body are subjected to filtering within the GP's decision making and implementation structures, especially at the specific stage of selection of works for implementation. Complex decision making procedures therefore transpire between the operation of the deliberative mechanism and final outputs delivered by the GP.

Between the two West Bengal GPs, the GP that fulfils a larger proportion of *Gram Sansad* demands (proposals) and has higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets (Debipur GP) actually has lower *Gram Sansad* effectiveness. In the Madhya Pradesh study, the same GP—Goutampur Colony GP—has higher *Gram Sabha* effectiveness and higher popular satisfaction with infrastructural assets. Yet the actual functioning of the *Gram Sabha* in Goutampur Colony GP shows that its attendees do not play any decision making role; the GP merely informs *Gram Sabha* attendees about its decisions. This means that the *Gram Sabha* of Goutampur Colony GP does not

have a significant impact on its performance. The findings of both state studies show that other variables, such as finances and capacity (and not effectiveness of deliberative forum), explain a GP's greater success in satisfying a higher proportion of popular demands.

The monitoring mechanism of Social Audit, too, does not have a significant causal impact on GP performance, as revealed by the findings of both the state studies. In both state studies, there is evident of the lack of operation of the required causal processes between Social Audit and GP performance. In both the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh studies, the GPs that had higher aggregate performance also did better on effectiveness of Social Audit. In the West Bengal study, the same GP (Debipur GP) had better NREGA output performance and better functioning of Social Audit. However the effectiveness of Social Audit does not explain Debipur GP's better NREGA output performance because Social Audit, as carried out in this GP, has exposed issues that have no bearing on NREGA output performance. Goutampur Colony GP in Madhya Pradesh, which had more effective Social Audit than Ramgarh GP, however had worse NREGA output performance than Ramgarh GP; its worse NREGA output performance is due to factors that cannot be conceivable addressed through Social Audit (see Chapter 5).

Debipur GP of West Bengal and Goutampur Colony GP of Madhya Pradesh, which had relatively more effective Social Audits than the cases that they were compared with, had a common weakness relating to the conduct of Social Audit: their respective GP staff members were actually playing an important role in carrying out Social Audit because of the lack of technical knowledge of the Social Audit team/VMC members. Such involvement possibly undermines independence and careful, comprehensive scrutiny in the conduct of Social Audit, and hinders Social Audit from

having a substantial impact on NREGA fund utilization and NREGA output performance.

The single most important factor responsible for the inability of accountability mechanisms to have a significant impact on GP performance is the failure of the sanctioning mechanism of elections to fulfil certain mediating conditions through which such impact could be brought about. This was seen in both state studies. GPs that had relatively more competitive elections in the two states—Nowdapanur GP in West Bengal and Ramgarh GP in Madhya Pradesh—had worse GP performance than the GPs they were compared with (Debipur GP and Goutampur Colony GP respectively). The most important reason for the failure of competitive elections to improve GP performance is the absence of performance-based sanctioning of incumbent elected representatives. In Nowdapanur GP, one-third of the incumbents who sought re-election were defeated; yet the retention and rejection of incumbents was based on non-performance considerations such as kinship and money power. In Ramgarh GP, the problem is one of incumbents not seeking re-election, which obviously precludes the possibility of performance-based sanctioning. Performance-based sanctioning is necessary for accountability to have a decisive impact on performance.

As already seen, the better performing GP in Madhya Pradesh (Goutampur Colony GP) had higher overall accountability as well, by virtue of its better position on the deliberative and monitoring dimensions. However, Goutampur Colony GP lacks any sanctioning of elected representatives (thus obviously lacking performance-based sanctioning) because of very low competitiveness of elections. This mainly explains why this GP's aggregate accountability (though relatively higher than Ramgarh GP) does not have a notable impact on performance, and thus does not explain its better performance.

Observations related to alternative primary school teachers in both states reveal that accountability of such teachers has a significant impact on their performance, because of the concrete possibilities of performance-based sanctioning of such teachers. The threat of performance based sanctioning (resulting from their contract-based or temporary tenure) pushes these teachers to fear performance-related complaints that can result in termination of their services, and thus perform more sincerely than mainstream primary school teachers. Similarly, GP members would also take their duties more seriously and contribute more sincerely towards GP functioning if they faced the concrete threat of performance-based sanctioning.

In addition to performance-based sanctioning of incumbents, competitive elections can possibly have an impact on GP performance through the fulfilment of two other causal pathways. The first is through the increased likelihood of selection of good quality candidates as elected representatives, and the second is through the impact of a numerically larger opposition. The findings of both state studies show that these possible conditions are not being realized in actual practice.

As hypothesized on the basis of the literature, competitive elections would make it likely that only competent or qualified candidates would survive the test of stiff electoral competition. Such competent candidates, on selection as elected representatives, would contribute their skills and efforts to improve the performance of the GP. In reality, however, better quality candidates are not being chosen as elected representatives in the electorally more competitive GPs. This is evident in the poor involvement and contribution of most elected representatives in GP functioning in all the chosen GPs, but more so in the electorally more competitive GPs, Nowdapanur GP (West Bengal) and Ramgarh GP (Madhya Pradesh). The reasons for this phenomena are two-fold: the prevalence of voting considerations (such as kinship or communal

factors), that undermine the consideration of advantageous qualities (such as dependability, knowledge or skill) of contesting candidates, and the fact that highly educated or talented individuals are rarely attracted to contest GP elections.

Competitive elections are naturally expected to foster a numerically large opposition. The literature hypothesizes that a numerically strong opposition would be powerful and assertive, and would keep the ruling group/chairperson of the GP alert to its shortcomings; this in turn may improve the performance of the GP.

There are some interesting differences between West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh as far as the nature of the GP opposition is concerned. West Bengal's *Panchayat* election law allows GP elections to be contested on a political party basis, as a result of which the GP opposition is constituted on a political party basis. The legal provision of Anti-defection that applies to GP decision making¹⁴⁵ further reinforces the idea of a party-based or group-based opposition. In contrast, Madhya Pradesh's *Panchayat* law does not allow for party role in GP elections and envisages the idea of an individual-based opposition (see Chapter 8). Naturally the so-called 'opposition' in the Madhya Pradesh GPs is much more fragmented and unorganized compared to the party-based opposition groups in the West Bengal GPs.

Higher competitiveness of elections, as seen in both the state studies, is not yielding the benefits of increased opposition effectiveness. In both the West Bengal GPs, the opposition members are involved in persuasion of and compromise with the ruling group, rather than in drawing attention to the shortcomings of the ruling group and registering their opposition to GP decisions. In Nowdapanur GP (which has greater electoral competition) there is actually less fair representation of opposition

¹⁴⁵According to West Bengal's *Panchayat* law, an elected GP member affiliated to a political party cannot, in any GP decision that is put to vote, vote in a matter contrary to that of the majority of the GP members belonging to the same political party. He/she can be disqualified in the event of violation of this legal provision (Government of West Bengal 2009a, Section 213A).

constituencies among all the constituencies in which NREGA works were carried out in 2008-09, compared to the same in Debipur GP. In the electorally more competitive Madhya Pradesh GP–Ramgarh GP—a noteworthy opposition has not developed (in spite of an inter-village divide that could have been a rallying ground for the emergence of an opposition), primarily due to the low interest, involvement and assertiveness of *Panchas*.

Considering the overall results of the inter-GP comparisons and the evidence on the causal impact of the various accountability mechanisms, the two state studies therefore show that there is no evidence of accountability having a significant impact on GP performance in the chosen cases. *The impact of accountability on GP performance is highly constrained because the actual operation of accountability mechanisms is failing to meet important mediating conditions required for having an impact on performance. Accountability therefore does not appear to explain variation in performance between the chosen GPs in each state. Finances and capacity are inferred to be the crucial determinants of GP performance in both the state studies. Capacity is found to be an especially critical factor in explaining performance differences between the West Bengal GPs because of its role in explaining the much higher fund utilization in the better performing GP (Debipur GP). A combination of fund composition and capacity explains performance variation between the two chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh.*

As already argued, *the major reason why the impact of accountability on GP performance is highly limited, is the absence of performance-based sanctioning in the chosen GPs. However, even if this condition is fulfilled, improvements in GP performance beyond a certain extent cannot be achieved in the absence of a sufficient amount of finances and capacity. Accountability may however (through*

performance-based sanctioning) improve the capacity of a GP from previously lower levels, if it is able to push incumbent elected representatives to be more involved in the working of the GP.¹⁴⁶ This increase in (one aspect of) GP capacity would then improve the performance of a GP. Capacity, in any event, remains a critical determinant of GP performance.

Contributions to the Literature

The findings of this study serve to reconsider and modify prevalent arguments and assumptions related to the accountability-performance relationship in local government in developing countries. *The central insight revealed by this study is that higher levels of accountability (in terms of popular control) do not automatically lead to better local government performance.* Certain conditions have to be fulfilled for accountability to have an impact on performance, the most important condition being performance-based sanctioning of incumbent elected representatives. This finding can serve to refine the understanding of the impact of accountability on local government performance that emerges from the arguments of the available studies such as Crook and Manor (1998).

Another contribution of this study comes from the empirical examination of theoretical propositions about the accountability-performance relationship (World Bank 1992; Walsh 1996). The findings of this study can serve to refine theoretical hypothesis suggested in the literature. The World Bank (1992) hypothesis states that higher accountability leads to greater congruence between policy and implementation (that is, effectiveness of performance or congruence between targets and actual outputs). This study reveals that accountability in the sense of popular control (accountability to the people) does not have such an impact in the chosen cases. Upward

¹⁴⁶This argument is consistent with Fiszbein's (1997) finding that accountability can actually promote capacity of local government, as seen in his study of local government in Columbia.

accountability (accountability to higher levels of government) may however possibly have such an impact, and this is a topic for future research to explore. Furthermore, this study has shown that other variables (such as finances and capacity) significantly affect the extent to which targets are met by local governments, and it is not only accountability that can determine the fulfilment of targets.

This study reveals the significance of local government performance determinants other than accountability, such as finances and capacity. It argues that mere accountability, in the context of low levels of capacity and financial resources, might not be able to push up the performance of a local government beyond a limited extent. A specific contribution of this study is its revelation of a case that has higher accountability but lower finances and capacity. This case (Nowdapanur GP in West Bengal) has poorer performance than the GP that has lower accountability but higher finances and capacity (Debipur GP), thus providing convincing evidence that higher accountability, by itself, might not ensure better local government performance. The available studies have not investigated the accountability-performance relationship for such a case.

This study also provides nuanced insights related to the nature of finances and capacity in local governments, by exploring these variables in terms of various indicators. It reveals the significance of not just the magnitude of finances, but also the composition of finances, for achieving higher GP performance. It subjects the presumed importance of fund availability to scrutiny by investigating the extent of fund utilization by the chosen GPs. With respect to capacity, it analyses various elements such as the training and awareness of GP members and their involvement in GP functioning, staff quality and availability, the nature of leadership, and strategic planning and financial management. The analytical treatment of capacity reveals reasons for the low degree of

involvement of most elected representatives in GP functioning. The complex nature of local government capacity is revealed by showing the inter-linkages existing between the nature of GP leadership, the extent of GP member involvement in GP functioning, the inclusiveness of decision making, strategic planning and financial management, and the extent of fund utilization.

This study contributes to a better understanding of local government accountability in developing countries by revealing that unique contextual factors affect the actual functioning of accountability mechanisms. The findings of each state study shows differences in the actual effectiveness of accountability mechanisms that have the same institutional (legal) features. The West Bengal study shows that political factors affect the effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism (*Gram Sansad*) while the Madhya Pradesh study shows that socio-economic factors affect the effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism of *Gram Sabha*. At same time, this study also provides insights on the impact of institutional features of accountability mechanisms on their actual effectiveness. It notes the implications of the different institutional features of elections and Village Assembly in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh (see previous section of this chapter).

This study generates insights related to the impact of specific accountability mechanisms such as elections, Village Assembly and Social Audit. As far as the impact of elections is concerned, it adds meaningful insights to the available empirical literature on the impact of electoral competition on local government performance. This study provides empirical evidence that competitive elections do not necessarily have a positive impact on local government performance. It serves to refine the view proposed by many studies that competitive elections improve local government performance (Echeverri-Gent 1992; Crook and Manor 1998; Faguet 2006; Majumdar 2009), by

showing that competitive elections have to fulfil certain conditions to have a positive impact on performance, the most important condition being performance-based sanctioning. The findings of this study empirically uphold the theoretical views of Keefer and Khemani (2005) who argued that certain constraints (such as voting that is based on identity-based factors and not performance considerations) undermine the impact of competitive elections on service delivery.

This study provides additional insights to the literature that examines the impact of deliberative mechanisms, especially the EDD literature (Baiocchi 2001; Fung and Wright 2001; Heller 2001). Like the EDD studies, this study carries out an empirical examination of the EDD hypothesis related to the impact of deliberative bodies on local government performance in specific cases (see Chapter 2), but explores certain aspects neglected by the available EDD studies. It carries out a detailed investigation of the intermediate decision making procedures that operate between the deliberative mechanism's functioning and actual GP service delivery. It analyses decision making procedures and considerations, and also the impact of intermediary actors that shape the passage of popular demands expressed in the deliberative forum through the 'black box' of local government decision making. It provides evidence of the filtering of popular demands expressed in the deliberative forum, unlike the available EDD studies. Unlike Baiocchi (2001) it does not rely on evidence of mere association of the effectiveness of deliberative forum with service delivery gains in order to prove the impact of the deliberative mechanism on performance. This study also reveals the importance of variables such as finances and capacity that are critical for the fulfilment of a higher proportion of popular demands. It reveals that deliberative mechanisms are not a magic bullet to cure all service delivery problems of local governments, and affirms the need

for realistic assessment of the potential of these mechanisms to improve local government performance.

Available findings on the impact of Social Audit mainly come from studies of local governments in ‘success story’ Indian states such as Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (Aakella and Kidambi 2007; Afridi 2008). This study explores the operation of Social Audit in the Indian states of West Bengal, whose actual experience with Social Audit has not yet been documented in the academic literature, as far as this author knows. The available studies, while revealing the effectiveness of Social Audit in their chosen cases, have not provided any evidence of the impact of Social Audit on the actual performance of their chosen local governments. This study shows that Social Audit, in its actual operation in the chosen states, is not having a significant impact on local government performance (specifically NREGA output performance). It reveals that the defects largely lie in the manner in which Social Audit is being carried out; the Social Audit process needs to be far more substantial, comprehensive and independent to have a notable impact on GP performance.

This study therefore contributes a nuanced exploration of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government. It unpacks the complexity in the accountability-performance relationship, by scrutinizing the operation of various mediating conditions that are required for accountability to have an impact on GP performance. Furthermore, it reveals the intermediate processes that operate between accountability and performance in local government. Qualitative insights provided by the stakeholders in local governance—local residents, elected representatives and staff members—are extensively used in this study, and shed light on the nature of popular control in GPs, and the nuances of its impact on GP performance.

Policy Relevance and Recommendations

Policy makers in some developing countries such as India have instituted a variety of formal accountability mechanisms such as elections, Village Assembly meetings or public meetings, and Social Audits in their local government experiments with an expectation of service delivery improvements resulting from the impact of these mechanisms. This study reveals insights on the actual effectiveness and impact of formal accountability mechanisms in the rural local government (*Panchayat*) systems of two Indian states. The findings of this study are therefore most directly relevant to policy architects of rural local government experiments in developing countries, especially India. The central argument of this study is that the formal accountability mechanisms in the chosen local government units (GPs) in India are creating a degree of popular control, but such control is not having a significant impact on local government performance. Furthermore, accountability mechanisms are actually functioning less effectively in some local government units, as a result of which the degree of popular control created by them is low. The findings of this study can help policy makers become aware of the weaknesses affecting the functioning of these mechanisms, and why they are not having a significant impact on local government performance. This may lead them to initiate reforms to address these weaknesses.

The most important failure of formal accountability mechanisms lies in the failure of elections (which are, in most local government experiments, the only available sanctioning mechanism)¹⁴⁷ to have an impact on local government performance. Policy makers should take some steps to increase the likelihood of elections having a positive impact on local government performance. Firstly, policy makers should institute measures to ensure that interested incumbent elected

¹⁴⁷Right to Recall is a sanctioning mechanism found in very few local government experiments such as Madhya Pradesh in India.

representatives of local governments have the opportunity to contest re-election. This in turn would open up opportunities for sanctioning of incumbents (which is necessary, but not sufficient, for performance-based sanctioning to take place). Increased opportunities for interested incumbents to contest re-election may be achieved by removing or modifying the practice of reservation of constituencies on rotational basis (seen in the case of women's and SC and ST reservation in West Bengal, and women's and OBC reservation in Madhya Pradesh). The practice of subjecting a large proportion of seats to rotational reservation prevents many incumbent elected representatives from re-contesting from their seats, even if they are interested to stand for re-elections. Secondly, policy makers should contemplate and implement measures to make the positions of elected representatives of local governments more rewarding, so that more incumbents feel the genuine desire to re-contest election and be successfully re-elected. If incumbents feel genuinely motivated to be successfully re-elected, then they will be pushed to work hard in their present term, provided that people select or reject incumbents on performance grounds. Increasing the remuneration, perks and recognition given to incumbents will motivate more of them to seek re-election. Similarly, such steps will also make the position of elected representatives more attractive to prospective election candidates so that more talented and educated local residents possessing awareness, cognitive skills or leadership qualities may be attracted to contest local government elections. Local government membership should be presented as a viable profession; this will make it more likely that competitive elections will result in the selection of talented candidates as representatives.

Policy makers should also take measures to increase the effectiveness of Social Audit. Higher authorities should be pro-active in ensuring that public participation in Social Audit is as broad based as possible, relevant local government records are

presented to the public in a simplified manner, and there is thorough review of all local government records and the local government's implementation activities in the Social Audit process. Higher authorities should pressurize persons carrying out Social Audit (such as Social Audit Team/VMC members) to ensure that they record all grievances and criticisms raised in the Social Audit process, and keep track of the action taken by the local governments to address the shortcomings exposed through Social Audit. Higher authorities should also forbid the involvement of local government staff or elected members in the Social Audit process in order to ensure its independence. Members of the Social Audit Teams/VMCs should be trained, and if possible, rewarded in some way for their efforts to ensure that they execute their task of scrutiny in a competent, serious way. Different aspects of local government functioning such as fund utilization, the quality of construction work and the time taken to complete works should come under scrutiny in the Social Audit process. In short, Social Audit should be more substantial, independent and comprehensive, and should not be treated as a mere formality.

Policy makers have to take pro-active steps to ensure that village assemblies play more than a superficial or endorsing role with respect to decision making in local governments. The higher authorities should ensure that local government staff or elected representatives conducting the meeting actively ask villager attendees for (and note down) proposals or demands for development works. The Madhya Pradesh government's practice of sending nodal officers to observe *Gram Sabha* meetings in some GPs is commendable, but the presence of nodal officers should become more regular and cover all GPs. The nodal officers in Madhya Pradesh should ensure that *Gram Sabha* meetings are being used to actually involve villagers in decision making, and not just inform villagers about the rules of government programmes and the

decisions of the GP. Authorities should also pressurize all local governments to publicize the dates and venues of Village Assembly meetings, and carry out awareness drives to make villagers aware of the significance of Village Assembly meetings. Such steps would lead to higher and more inclusive attendance in Village Assembly meetings.

This study will not suggest that all proposals made in the deliberative forum of Village Assembly should actually be implemented by the local government because to do is likely to be humanly impossible, given the enormous volume of Village Assembly proposals in some cases such as the West Bengal GPs (especially as seen in Debipur GP). Policy makers should, however, increase the flow of appropriate funds and take steps to increase the capacity of local governments. Adequate availability of untied funds and non-NREGA funds is absolutely critical for Indian GPs to be able to fulfil a higher proportion of popular demands in the context of a plethora of restrictive rules and regulations. Accountability, as established through mechanisms such as Village Assembly, is no substitute for finances and capacity in fulfilling popular demand.

Given the importance of capacity as a determinant of local government performance, increasing the human resource capacity of local government units should be a top priority of policy makers. Such capacity would enable local governments to better utilize their financial resources. The primary solution to the problem of capacity, in the single staff-member Madhya Pradesh GPs, lies in taking immediate steps to provide more staff members to GPs. In all Indian states (including West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh) there should also be urgent steps taken to institute regular and intensive training of elected representatives all over the concerned state. Various measures should also be initiated to make elected member positions more attractive so that talented and educated individuals stand for local government elections. Such

measures would in turn lead to elected members being more aware, motivated and involved in the activities of the GP, and making superior contributions to GP functioning. In the Madhya Pradesh context, policy architects should seriously consider amending the provision of *Sarpanch* chairpersonship of all standing committees of the GP, so that more elected representatives get an opportunity to enjoy leadership positions through committee chairpersonship (as in West Bengal). Such a reform would lead to increased interest and involvement of elected representatives and consequently improve the GP's capacity and the inclusiveness of GP functioning.

Areas of Future Research

This study develops an inference on the accountability-performance relationship in local government that should be subjected to future empirical examination for the sake of greater robustness. There are two ways in which future studies may test this inference and add further insights to it – firstly, by exploring other cases and if possible, covering a larger number of cases; and secondly, by introducing temporal variation (in addition to spatial variation that this study covers)

This study has covered four cases--two GPs each in the Indian states of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Increasing the number of cases would have the benefit of adding more robustness to the findings, as long as totally diverse cases (for e.g. GPs in two different states) are not compared directly with each other. Different case combinations may be explored in different studies, by controlling some key variables and varying others when comparing cases.

Another improvement on this study that could add greater robustness would be the incorporation of temporal variation in addition to spatial variation. In future accountability-performance research, not only should different cases (local government

units) be compared, but there should also be comparison within a single case between different years. Assessing long term trends in accountability and performance may lead to more robust results than assessing accountability and performance for one point of time.

This study has carried out a comprehensive examination of the impact of accountability on performance. The conceptualization and operationalization of accountability in this study has been very wide to capture the notion of overall popular control generated through the available formal accountability mechanisms in local government. Future research may add fresh insights through more in-depth examination of the functioning and impact of particular accountability mechanisms such as elections, Social Audit, Village Assembly and Right to Recall.

In-depth studies in future should examine elections as a mechanism of sanctioning of incumbent elected members of local government, focusing on the grounds for such sanctioning and the impact of such sanctioning on local government performance. Such a study may have the following components—firstly, a measurement of the extent to which incumbent local government representatives stand for re-election (assessed for several years for each case through the reliable election data); secondly, the measurement of the extent of defeat of incumbents who stand for re-election; thirdly, an assessment of the factors determining voter choice (through survey of local residents) to reveal the extent to which performance considerations affect voting. In cases where there is sound evidence of frequent performance-based sanctioning of incumbents, it should be seen whether there is a trend of performance improvement over years (within the case) and better performance in comparison to other cases. Such studies should be carried out in one or few provinces/countries that have party based rural local government elections (such as West Bengal) and for others that do not have

party based rural local government elections (such as Madhya Pradesh) for the sake of greater generalizability

Studies on the impact of Social Audit on GP performance in India (for NREGA or for other programmes for which Social Audit might be mandated in the chosen states) must be carried out. The aim of such study would be to yield robust conclusions on the effectiveness of Social Audit and its impact on GP performance, and an identification of the contextual and institutional features that make it effective. Such studies may explore elements such as the institutional features of Social Audit, the processes and actors involved, the nature of public and NGO participation, and the tracing of the outcome of Social Audit (that is, whether any punitive measure has been taken against guilty parties or remedial measures have been taken in response to the findings of Social Audit) and its eventual impact on GP performance. Such a study may be conducted in one or both of the 'success story' states (Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh), selecting GPs within them that are noted for their successes in Social Audit. The findings thereof should be compared with the findings of similar studies in other states that have no such reputation for successful Social Audit.

The actual functioning of deliberative mechanisms such as Village Assemblies should be explored in diverse empirical contexts, which will shed further light on the contextual and institutional factors affecting their actual functioning. More studies should be taken up to trace the impact of the functioning of Village Assemblies (or other deliberative forums) on local government performance. More refined insights may come from future studies that accurately discern the extent of genuine popular demands expressed in the deliberative forums of their chosen cases, separating such genuine popular demands from the demands that are prepared by intermediary organizations or the local government and formally endorsed in the meetings of the deliberative forum.

Having identified the extent of such genuine popular demands, the researcher may then proceed to gauge the extent to which such demands have been fulfilled in the outputs of the concerned local government.

The state of Madhya Pradesh is one of the very few cases in the developing world that has the provision of Right to Recall of elected representatives of local government. Right to Recall can make for a very direct connection between performance and sanctioning, and if properly used, can prove to be a potent means of performance-based sanctioning. None of the GPs in Madhya Pradesh covered in this study had however ever experienced actual exercise of this right. Future research should select some local government units in Madhya Pradesh (or any other relevant province or country) that have actually experienced exercise of this right, and carry out intensive analysis in the chosen cases of the grounds on which the right was used, and the tracing of the impact of its exercise on GP performance.

It can be seen that there is considerable room for future research on the very complex but intriguing topic of the relationship between accountability and performance in local government. This study has provided a comprehensive but broad perspective on the topic, and findings from more specific and in-depth studies will further enrich our understanding of the relationship.

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APPENDIX - CHARACTERISTICS OF CHOSEN CASES (GPs)

The Chosen GPs of West Bengal

Debipur GP, located in Memari-I Block of Burdwan District, has an area of 3171.53 hectares and a population of 26, 438. It has an SC population of 7239 (27.4%) and an ST population of 4114 (15.6%). It has a literacy percentage of 59.94% (Government of West Bengal 2007). This is a large GP with 27 villages and 17 constituencies. It is well connected by a motorable all-weather road and a regular bus service and available rickshaws from the nearest railway station of Debipur, the bus journey taking about 10 minutes. As per the Self-evaluation Exercise Report of this GP, 21-30% of its families live below the poverty line.

Nowdapanur GP, located in Berhampore Block of Murshidabad District of West Bengal, has an area of 1947.62 hectares and a population of 21,244. It has an SC population of 2122 (10%) and no ST population. 53.05% of its population is literate (Government of West Bengal 2007). This GP has twelve villages and twelve constituencies. It is about 8 km from the nearest town of Berhampore, which is the block and district Headquarter. This GP is comparatively inaccessible, there being no bus service and an intermittent rickshaw service to reach it, and the road leading to it being of poor condition. As per the Audit Report of the GP, 53.2% of its families live below the poverty line.

The Chosen GPs of Madhya Pradesh

Goutampur Colony GP is located in Obaidullahgunj Block in Raisen District of Madhya Pradesh. The total population of Goutampur Colony GP (as per figures given by the Secretary of the GP) is 1450. This GP has two constituent villages of Goutampur

Colony (population 800) and Kesalwada (population 130), and two hamlets of Jondra (population 400) and Goutampur Tola (population 120). Goutampur Colony village is mainly SC and the others are mainly ST in caste composition. The overall population is 60% ST, 30% SC and 10% others. This GP is located about 8 km away from the block Headquarter Obaidullahgunj, and is connected by a motorable all-weather road to the block headquarter.

Ramgarh GP is situated in Narsinghgarh Block of Rajgarh District of Madhya Pradesh. The population of Ramgarh GP (as per figures given by the Secretary of the GP) is 1600. There are three villages in this GP: Ramgarh (72 families), Bawdikheda (25 families) and Neenaur (101 families). This GP has 198 families of whom 89 are OBC (44.9%), 39 are *Rajput* (19.7%), 59 are SC (29.8%) and 11 are ST (5.5%). Neenaur has mainly OBCs in its population, whereas Ramgarh village and Bawdikheda village have *Rajput*-dominated populations. The connectivity of this GP is very poor since the road from the nearest town and block Headquarter (Narsinghgarh) to the GP is of very poor quality. Ramgarh and Bawdikheda villages of Ramgarh GP are not accessible by motorable roads. The road from Narsinghgarh town to Neenaur village of this GP is motorable. Inter-village connectivity within the GP is also very poor because the roads connecting the constituent villages of the GP are not motorable.